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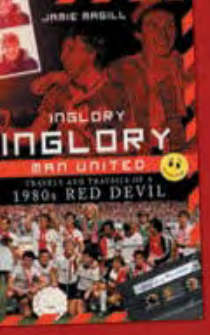

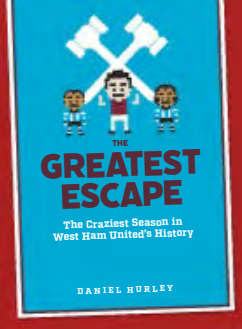

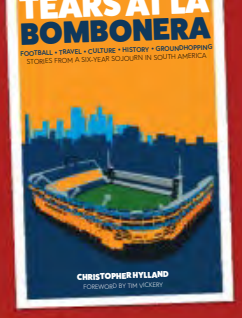

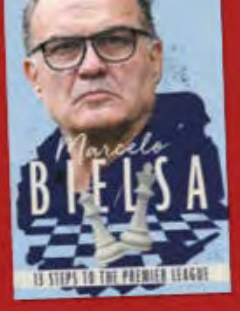

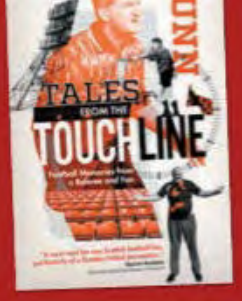

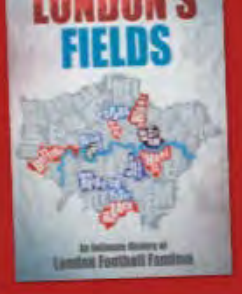

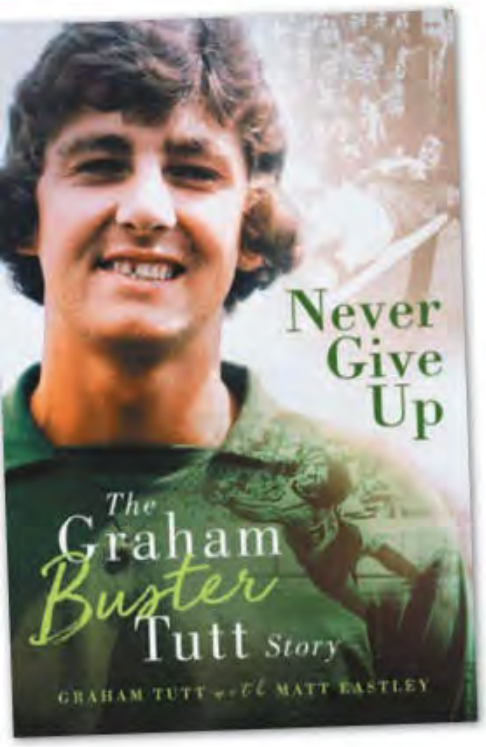

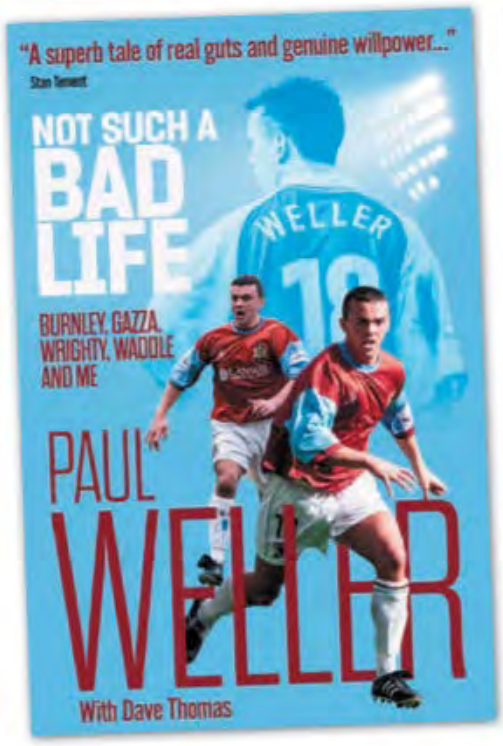

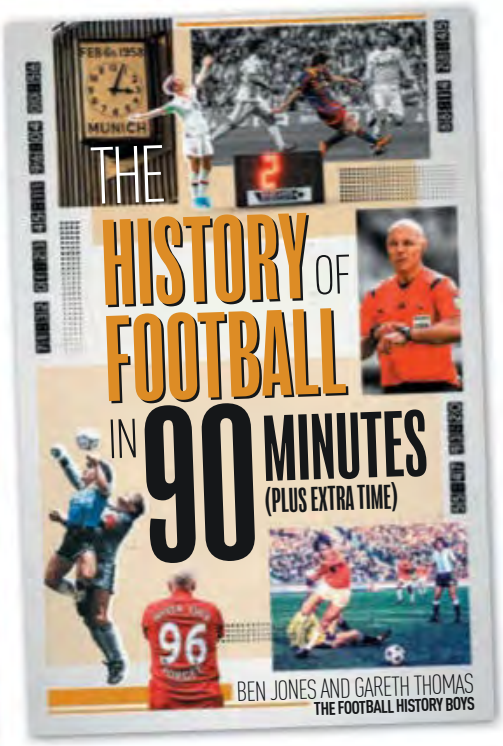

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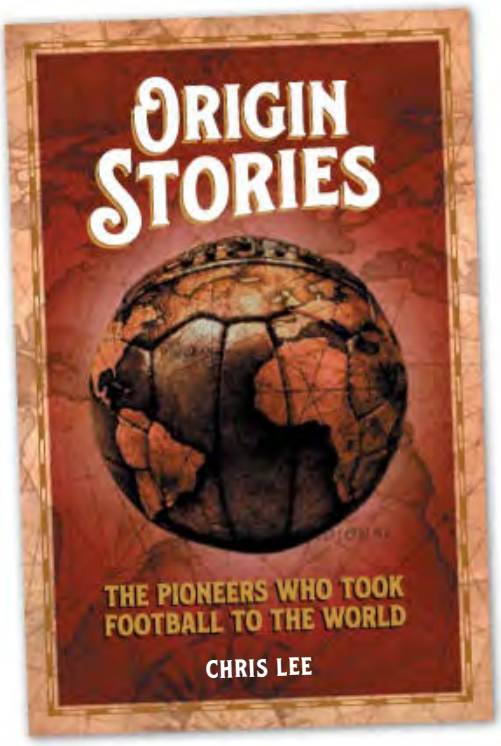

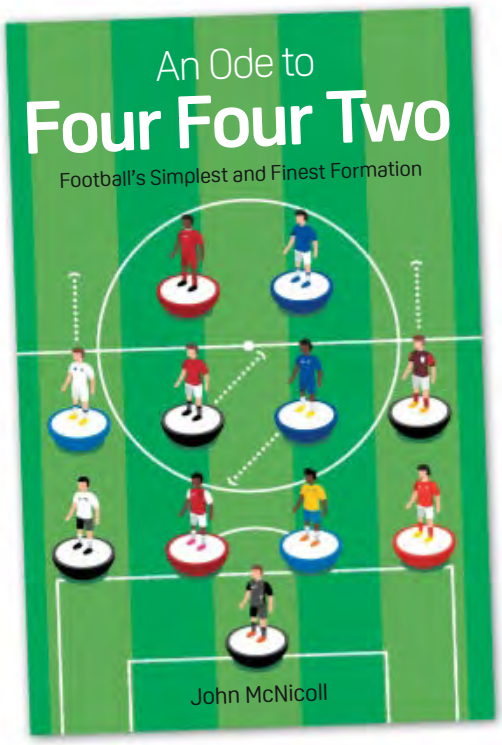

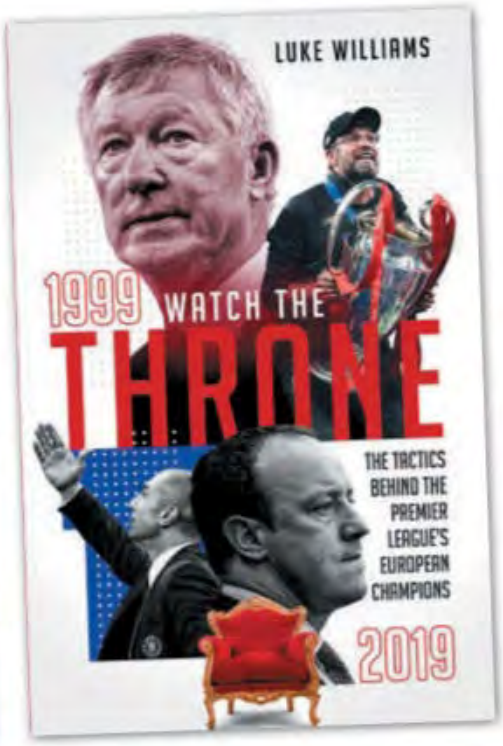

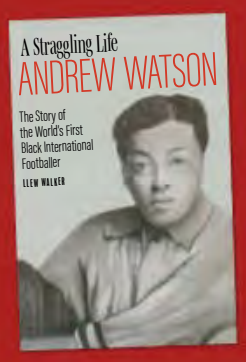

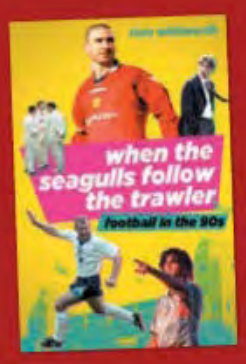

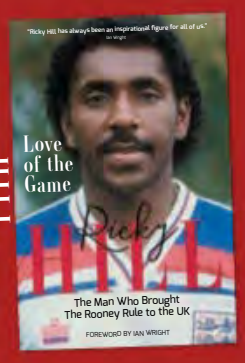

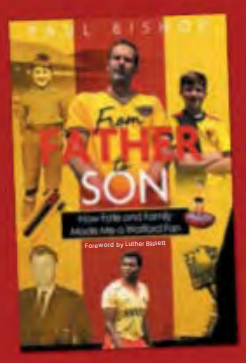

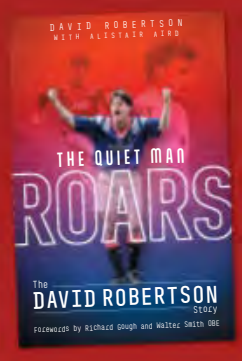

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WorldSoccer

The ultimate guide to Euro 2020

June 2021

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Euro 2020...the tournament ball on the Wembley pitch

"It is important that we give the host cities and governments as much time as we can to formulate an accurate picture of what will be possible…fans are such a big part of what makes football special"

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin on his hope of seeing supporters in stadiums at Euro 2020

FROM THE EDITOR

So, the wait is over. After being pushed back a year due to the coronavirus pandemic, the long-awaited, highly-anticipated European Championship is finally upon us.

Still to be referred to as "Euro 2020" – a decision the UEFA executive committee made to "keep the original vision of the tournament, which was set to celebrate the 60th anniversary" and also to "serve as a reminder of how the whole football family came together to respond to the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, and of the difficult times that Europe, and the world, had to go through in 2020" – this European Championship will make history for several reasons.

At the time of writing, and at the risk of some cities' host status being under threat as they had "yet to provide assurances whether fans will be allowed", this will be the first pan-European tournament, hosted by several nations in a "romantic" one-off event to celebrate the Euros' 60th "birthday".

It will also be the first European Championship to take place in an odd year, the first to use Video Assistant Referees, the first to allow for five substitutes to be used by each team per game and, potentially, the first to host games with limited or no supporters in stadiums. There has also been talk behind the scenes that, due to a fear of positive COVID-19 tests arising during the tournament, each nation will be allowed to name an expanded 25-man squad instead of 23. No firm decision had been made on this as of our press date, so our national team profiles herein continue with the traditional 23-man squad pen pics (although we do include players "also in contention" for places who could still make the cut, be it part of the original 23-man squad list or in the case of expanded rosters).

If supporters are allowed into stadiums, England will be one of the main beneficiaries. Hosting major international tournament matches for the first time since 1996 when the Three Lions went agonisingly close to going all the way on home soil, Gareth Southgate's side will play all of their group games at Wembley – and also the semi-final and final should they get that far. A bouncing Wembley Stadium with chants of "Football's Coming Home" could once again capture the imagination and help propel the country to win a first major piece of silverware since 1966.

The chances of fans being present look more positive after the announcement that supporters would be allowed in attendance at Wembley for the English League Cup and FA Cup finals; pilot events to test the return of big crowds and marking the achievement of important milestones. With many of the hosts also submitting plans for how they will accommodate fans (and how many) to UEFA in early April, the will is certainly there. Fingers crossed progress can continue to be made across all 12 host

Upset…will Euro 2020 produce another shock like Greece's triumph back in 2004?

"COVID could play a part but I think there's a skill to picking 23. It means you've got to make good decisions and some of that can be lost as you get an extended group...I'm not 100 per cent for it"

England manager Gareth Southgate has his say on squads being increased to 25 players for the Euros

Colourful support... there's real hope fans will be in attendance at this summer's Euros

Chances of a big upset are not out of the question...the European Championship has often provided the platform for such shocks to occur on the biggest stage

cities ahead of the big kick-off.

There are also some important landmarks to be reached on the pitch. Cristiano Ronaldo is just one goal away from becoming the tournament's all-time outright top goalscorer (he's currently level with Michel Platini on nine), his country Portugal are aiming to become only the second nation to retain the trophy, and France are hoping to become the fourth team to hold both the World and European crowns simultaneously.

There are also historic, major international tournament debuts for Finland and North Macedonia, while the return to European Championship finals participation of Scotland (their first since 1996) and the Netherlands (who missed out in 2016) will provide plenty of vibrancy and colour in the stands if their spectacular supporters are allowed in.

In these unpredictable and unprecedented times, chances of a big upset are not out of the question – in fact, it is a real possibility – and the European Championship has often provided the platform for such shocks to occur on the biggest stage. Denmark shocking the world to win Euro '92 and Greece upsetting the applecart to win in Portugal in 2004 will give hope to every nation that anything is possible this summer. Let's hope that can provide us with a tournament to remember – and, hopefully, for all the right reasons.

Stephen Fishlock, Editor

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Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

An historic Euros beckons

Each succeeding European Championship writes a new page in football history. Usually it's the achievement of an outstanding player or team; maybe even a dramatic match. But Euro 2020, delayed for a year, is something else entirely: history without a ball even being kicked.

Football's European Championship stands at No.3 in terms of the world's great sporting events. The World Cup and Olympic Games are on a far-away distant plane through their status as popular, social, political and cultural phenomena which transcend sport itself. Rugby union lays its own claim to slot No.3 in terms of "world" competition, but it cannot compete with the Euros in terms of global attraction: 851 million TV viewers for its own World Cup in 2019 compared with two billion for Euro 2016.

The Euros boast a magnetic appeal far beyond Europe. The quality of the players, teams and football itself is one reason, but another is a rebound effect from the Champions League.

The Bosman ruling of 1995 opened the way for the multi-national make-up of the Champions League teams with "home" favourites in so many nations around the world. An adherence to European clubs and their own "local" stars acted like tentacles in sucking in millions of far-distant fans.

FIFA's steady relaxation of dual nationality rules means fans from Brazil to Burkina Faso may even have an exile to follow. UEFA and the Euros reap the benefit in both interest as well as television and sponsor revenues.

Football has played a not-insignificant social role during the horrific peaks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially the pressure to keep playing was cash-driven. But the everyday availability of live action via TV and streaming services provided both an entertaining distraction from the isolating confusion of lockdown and a source of social unity.

Euro 2020... the European Championship trophy

Credit to UEFA and president Aleksander Ceferin for pushing ahead stubbornly with the rescheduled staging of Euro 2020 once last year's postponement had been enforced. Indeed, hosting matches between the opener in Rome on June 11 and final at Wembley on July 11 is becoming a totemic statement for not only football but also for the governments of the 12 countries sharing the finals.

> Football's European Championship stands at No.3 in terms of the world's great sporting events

Politicians have begun to see carrying through hosting – with whatever crowd restrictions health directors may demand – as a message to voters about their own competence to steer a fragile course beyond the pandemic.

Thrust into the background have been the howls of derision at the pan-European shape of the tournament. The concept of celebrating the finals' 60th anniversary in this manner was first set before the UEFA executive committee in Kiev by then-president Michel Platini during the closing stages of Euro 2012.

This was his solution to a reluctance of bidders. Germany's DFB considered it then stepped back, leaving Turkey in pole position.

Trouble was, Turkey's Istanbul was also bidding for the 2020 Olympic Games. Platini and Olympic president Thomas Bach insisted state president Recep Tayyip Erdogan had to choose one or the other. He opted to bid for the Olympics and, ironically, by the time Istanbul was outbid by Tokyo, so UEFA had come up with its own sharing, caring Euros solution.

Some 32 countries showed initial interest in staging matches, whittled down to 12 in 2012 when Wembley was allocated the semi-finals and final; all a far cry from the minimalist inaugural finals in France in 1960. These featured only four teams, subsequently expanded to eight in Italy in 1980, 16 in England in 1996 and 24 in France in 2016.

As with the World Cup, increasing

the number of teams lowers the overall quality of the football. As long as the knockout drama is maintained, however, and as long as more FAs share in the cash bonanza from both expanded finals and qualifiers, the game will accept the price of driving star players into the ground.

Ceferin, UEFA's Slovene president, has truly taken possession of Platini's concept. He had been in charge only a matter of weeks in 2016 when he embarked on a promotional whistle-stop tour of Europe. He even adopted the appropriate language, saying: "UEFA wanted the 2020 tournament to be a true celebration of the game we all love and cherish. What better way could there be than to take the tournament, for one time only, to all four corners of our beautiful continent?"

Such enthusiasm was absent when the Soviet Union's Anatoli Ilyin scored the first goal in the event's history in a 3-1 qualifying win over Hungary in Moscow on September 28, 1958. Only 17 nations even entered. Italy, England and Germany all stood aloof and Spain withdrew rather than play the Soviets, politically anathema to the regime of dictator Francisco Franco.

Steadily quality overcame querulous minds. Spain threw aside political angst to beat the USSR in Madrid in 1964, Italy won the only replayed final against Yugoslavia in 1968, and Franz Beckenbauer's magnificent West Germany managed a victory in 1972 that led on to World Cup glory two years later.

Great players, great moments: Antonin Panenka's iconic winning penalty in 1976, Platini's nine-goal haul in 1984, Marco van Basten's stunning winning volley against the Soviet Union in 1988. Denmark's players rushed back from their holidays – not quite true but it was a good story – to win as late substitutes for banned Yugoslavia in 1992.

The fragmentation of the USSR and Yugoslavia saw UEFA expand towards its current membership of 55, all joining the clamour to press their right to a slice of the Euros cake.

This led to the latest qualifying complexities featuring not only lucky loser play-offs among the third-placed teams in the preliminary groups, but the cross-tournament involvement of stage winners from the new Nations League. Somehow UEFA managed to complete the long-postponed play-offs between lockdowns but it was a close-run thing. UEFA was very nearly hoist by its expansionist petard.

Now the route is clear, pandemic restrictions permitting.

Many of the teams look very different compared with a year ago, making predictions a greater lottery than usual. Yet consistency and momentum tell their own tale: the 24 finalists include nine of the ten group leaders from the first wave of 2022 World Cup qualifiers: Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, England, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey.

Belgium have been top of the FIFA rankings since 2018 while World Cup holders France are guided by a man in Didier Deschamps who boasts matchless tournament title-winning experience as both player and coach. Yet the shape of the draw means that if both win their groups they cannot face each other in the final.

Other questions turn on whether England can withstand the weight of expectation generated by their semi-final finish at the last World Cup and how Germany will react to a crisis of management and recent results.

To ease physical pressure on players already running on empty after a squashed-up season, squads may be extended to 25 players and five substitutes permitted. Of course it is the best players – Kylian Mbappe, Kevin De Bruyne, Cristiano Ronaldo etc. – who shoulder the greatest physical burden because they and their clubs go most of the way in all their competitions.

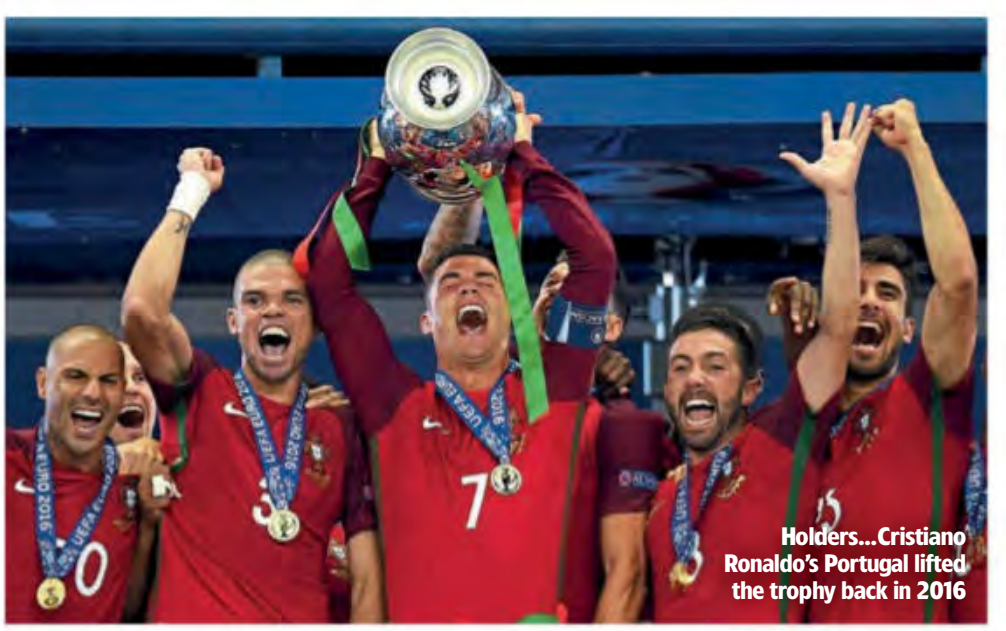
This is a factor that may weigh on the ultimate outcome once the six groups and 51 matches have been completed. Not necessarily a triumph of the finest but of the fittest.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...MICHEL PLATINI?

Frenchman Michel Platini was the president of UEFA who came up with the idea of spreading Euro 2020 all across Europe, from Bilbao in the west to Baku in the east, St. Petersburg in the north to Rome in the south.

Platini was also then a vice-president of FIFA and likely future president of the world governing body. His status in the power structure, plus his record as inspirational nine-goal top-scoring captain of champions France in 1984, meant no-one raised a word in objection.

That was in 2010. Five years later and Platini was out of the game, banished for an eventual four years over a FIFA payments scandal. Platini, now 65, has continued to protest his innocence despite various setbacks at appeal and remains the subject of a Swiss criminal investigation.



Holders...Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal lifted the trophy back in 2016

BOOKS THIS MONTH

SILVER LININGS
by David Hartrick (Pitch Publishing, £12.99)

As England boss, Bobby Robson was celebrated, derided and Diego-ed. His team missed one Euros, self-destructed at another, were cheated out of Mexico '86 and came within two kicks of a World Cup final. No England manager can equal the drama of his eight years in charge. Set against the backdrop of a vicious newspaper circulation war and the rise of hooliganism, this is the story of how Robson managed to deliver the seemingly impossible: hope.

AN ODE TO FOUR FOUR TWO
by John McNicoll (Pitch Publishing, £12.99)

Formations continue to evolve since the birth of the game. From teams playing with four or five forwards, to the modern era of teams with just one, arguably the best formation is 4-4-2. Some of the greatest teams have used this system: Milan, Barcelona and Manchester United all enjoyed glorious eras playing 4-4-2. And who can forget Leicester City reviving the formation to win the Premier League in 2016? This is the story of how teams, big and small, have played the system to perfection.

Improvement needed

Das Team are desperate to end their poor run

Since beating the United States 2-1 in their final game at the 1990 World Cup, Austria have appeared at three major tournaments – the 1998 World Cup, Euro 2008 and Euro 2016 – without winning a single match. Those nine games have produced four draws, five defeats and just five goals scored.

The last time they got beyond a group stage at any tournament was back in 1982, and even then it was with the help of the infamous match in Gijon where their 1-0 defeat to West Germany sent both teams through at the expense of Algeria. So it is a low bar when it comes to improving on recent performances.

This time around, the draw has been kind to Austria on paper, with Ukraine, Netherlands and rank outsiders North Macedonia as group opponents. But there are other reasons for optimism.

Austrian football has improved notably over the last decade under Swiss coach Marcel Koller and now German Franco Foda. The Austrian federation laid the foundations back in 2009 with the "Project 12" programme which offered special training to the country's most talented 15 to 21-year-olds, including aspects like sports medicine and psychology. The graduates include defender Aleksandar Dragovic and David Alaba, the most successful player in Austrian history.

Meanwhile, Austria have also emulated Switzerland by tapping into the potential offered by the country's community of second-generation immigrants, something they had previously failed to do, whilst the emergence of RB Salzburg has also helped.

Austrian football has improved notably over the last decade

Although much of the club's focus has been scouting and developing players from Africa, local players have also benefitted from their renowned academy system. Defenders Martin Hinteregger and Stefan Lainer, and midfielders Xaver Schlager and Stefan Ilsanker have all been raised at the club and its feeder Liefering.

Up until March's embarrassing 4-0 World Cup qualifying home defeat to Denmark, which even led to murmurings that Foda could be fired, Austria's recent results had been good. They bounced back from losing their first two games to qualify comfortably for Euro 2020 and last year won their group in the second tier of the Nations League to earn promotion.

On the other hand, they still lack experience against top-class opposition. Question marks remain over coach Foda who, despite a solid record, has frustrated the supporters with an overcautious approach, and Alaba, often criticised for not reproducing his Bayern form at international level.

Foda must also decide whether Marko Arnautovic should be brought back to spearhead the attack after two years of playing in China, or whether to unleash the hugely promising Sasa Kalajdzic.

Brian Homewood

Marauder... Stefan Lainer ready to whip in a cross

FRANCO FODA

How do you reflect on the qualifying campaign and your team's displays?
After the two defeats at the start, we had our backs to the wall. But the team always believed in themselves. It was important we stayed calm and carried our ideas on. Then, it was extremely important that we won the next two games. You could see the team is able to handle high-pressure situations well.

Where is David Alaba a better fit – at left-back or in midfield?
David can play in several positions at the highest level, which is exceptional in international football. He is an intelligent, versatile player who can read a game very well. In the national team, David plays the position where it's best for the team. I try to come up with a plan for how to win against the next opponent. I position the players accordingly. Everyone, not just David Alaba.

How important is Marcel Sabitzer to the way the team functions?
Marcel is a player that every coach likes to have in his squad. He is extremely ambitious and confident, but never satisfied with himself. Since becoming a father, he has developed further as a personality. In the last few years,

Equaliser...Aleksandar Dragovic levels against the Faroe Islands in World Cup qualifying

he has tried to reach his maximum. Marcel is a player who gives everything in the 90 minutes and works a lot for the team.

How does Marko Arnautovic feature in your plans for Euro 2020?
Marko once again proved last year that he is a very important player, even if he doesn't have a high rhythm. He has outstanding quality, he can give the decisive impetus in the game and thus make the difference. He is also a leading figure for our young players.

Is it difficult to strike a balance between experience and the emerging talent?
In the last few years, there has been a bit of a change in the team. Some well-established players ended their international careers after Euro 2016, and many young, talented players moved up. A new hierarchy has formed and this process takes time. We benefit a lot from the good mix of experienced and young players that we have in the team.

What's your assessment of your Group C opponents?
We have been drawn in a very tough group. The Netherlands are the favourites. Ukraine remained unbeaten in qualifying and topped their group ahead of Portugal and Serbia. We know North Macedonia very well. They have very, very good players, but it's not a disadvantage that we've played them before.

Control...Foda took over from Marcel Koller

Can Austria reach the knockout stage?
We are in a positive mood because we have always achieved our goals so far. Everyone will be motivated and focused. But there is one thing I will give my players on their way: they have the chance to write history, to become the first Austrian national team to win a game at the Euros.

Samindra Kunti

TACTICS

Well-drilled pressing

With the majority of their players based in the Bundesliga, it is not surprising that Austria's game is based on a well-drilled pressing of the opposition. Their total of 404 balls recovered in the European qualifiers is one of the best in the competition and they averaged 59 per cent possession. Yet, there is still a feeling that the attack lacks creative spark and that there is too much emphasis on not conceding goals.

The first big question for Foda, who generally uses a 4-2-3-1, is where to play David Alaba. He is comfortable at left-back or in midfield and, under Foda, has played in both roles although more recently in defence. If he plays in midfield, Andreas Ulmer becomes the left-back.

Julian Baumgartlinger has become a fixture as one of the pair in front of the defence for the best part of a decade but suffered a knee injury in January and may not be fit in time. In his absence Stefan Ilsanker would take one of the two places, partnered possibly by Florian Grillitsch.

Up front Michael Gregoritsch was preferred in qualifying, although Marko Arnautovic is still in the reckoning and Sasa Kalajdzic is showing huge promise.

Leader...David Alaba is Austria's star player

In-demand...Marcel Sabitzer is a wanted man this summer

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 2
v **England**
(a, Middlesbrough)
Jun 6
v **Slovakia**
(h, Venue TBC)

Talent...Sasa Kalajdzic could lead the line

GROUP GAMES
Jun 13
v **North Macedonia**
(Bucharest)
Jun 17
v **Netherlands**
(Amsterdam)
Jun 21
v **Ukraine**
(Bucharest)

THE VIEW FROM AUSTRIA

"It's not a criticism of David Alaba, but it just doesn't work that way [in midfield]. He is a world-class defender, he has won everything with Bayern Munich in that position. That can't work that he should now all of a sudden carry the game up front, why is he playing there at all?"

Roman Mahlich, TV analyst and ex-international midfielder

"The fans have low expectations, even though many players are based with big German clubs. Under the overly-cautious coach Franco Foda, the team have rarely showed what they are capable of. It would be no surprise if Austria were to fail in the group stage."

Fritz Neumann, Der Standard

Under-fire... Franco Foda

COACH

Franco FODA (Ger)
Age 55 (23.04.66)
Appointed October 2017

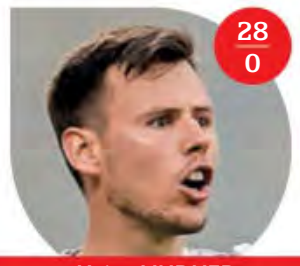
Born in Germany to an Italian father and German mother, Foda has been coaching since 2002 yet has only worked at two clubs – Sturm Graz in his homeland, where he had three separate stints and won the Austrian Bundesliga, and Kaiserslautern, who were in the German second division at the time.

Although results have been good, he has been lumbered with a reputation for being too unadventurous. He played for several Bundesliga clubs and made two appearances for West Germany – both on a South American tour in 1987.

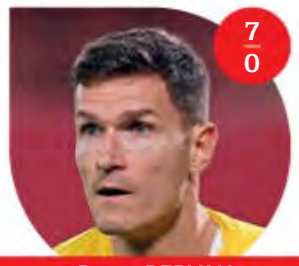
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS



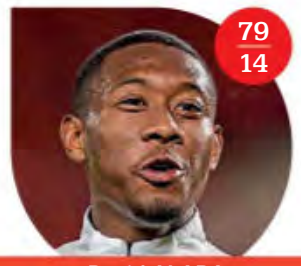
Heinz LINDNER
Basle (Sui)
Age 30 (17.07.90)
The first choice in 2017-18, Lindner has fallen way out of favour since, but still might make the squad as the third-choice keeper.



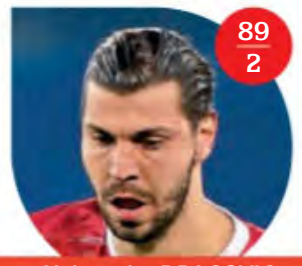
Pavao PERVAN
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 33 (13.11.87)
Has generally found himself as second-choice at Wolfsburg since his move in 2018. Despite this, became Austria's first choice over the course of 2020.

Alexander SCHLAGER
LASK
Age 25 (01.02.96)
After being loaned around between clubs early in his career, he has settled at LASK Linz. First-choice in the three World Cup qualifiers in March.

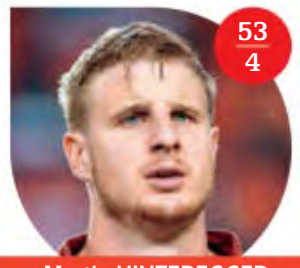
DEFENDERS



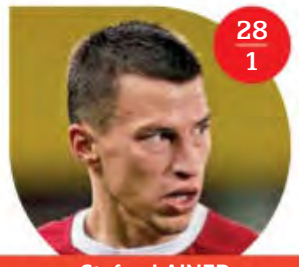
David ALABA
Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 28 (24.06.92)
With two Champions League titles and tons of German domestic honours, Alaba is by far the most successful player in Austrian football history.



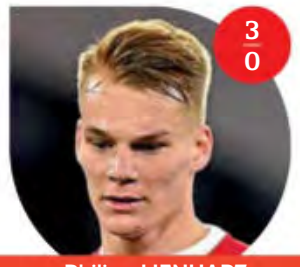
Aleksandar DRAGOVIC
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Age 30 (06.03.91)
Experienced central defender with a powerful free-kick. As a Basle player, he was once reprimanded for playing a prank on a Swiss politician.



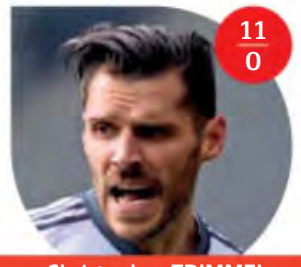
Martin HINTEREGGER
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
Age 28 (07.09.92)
A Red Bull Salzburg product, he's been a regular at centre-back since 2013 and played at Euro 2016. One of the Bundesliga's most consistent defenders.



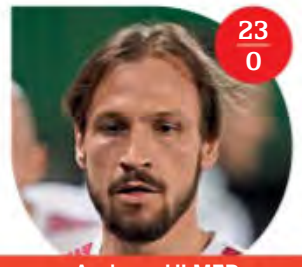
Stefan LAINER
Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger)
Age 28 (27.08.92)
A late developer, he made his debut in 2017 and has become the first-choice right-back in the last two seasons. Son of Leopold, who won 28 Austria caps.



Philipp LIENHART
Freiburg (Ger)
Age 24 (11.07.96)
The centre-back joined Real Madrid as teenager in 2014 but made only one first-team appearance in four years. Now a regular with Freiburg.

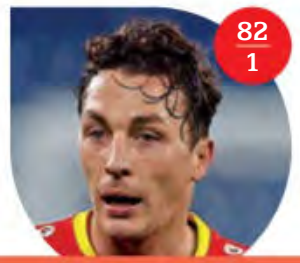


Christopher TRIMMEL
Union Berlin (Ger)
Age 34 (24.02.87)
After making a couple of appearances in 2009-10, he returned to the squad in 2019 and is now considered Lainer's reserve at right-back.

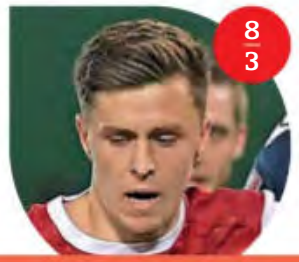


Andreas ULMER
Red Bull Salzburg
Age 35 (30.10.85)
Left-back who won his first cap in 2009, was then overlooked for several years but featured regularly during the qualifiers. Captains Red Bull Salzburg.

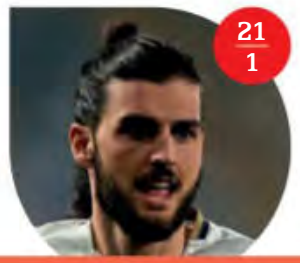
MIDFIELDERS



Julian BAUMGARTLINGER
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Age 33 (02.01.88)
Defensive midfielder, strong in the tackle and at holding onto the ball, although sometimes let down by his crossing. Struggling to be fit in time.

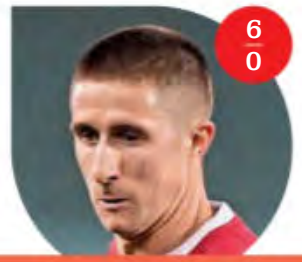


Christoph BAUMGARTNER
Hoffenheim (Ger)
Age 21 (01.08.99)
Versatile attacking midfielder who likes to take on opponents. Settled well at Hoffenheim after the setback of a red card in his second Bundesliga appearance.

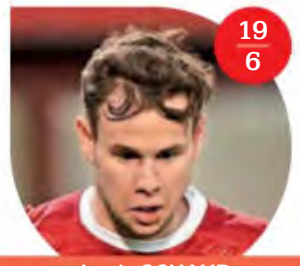


Florian GRILLITSCH
Hoffenheim (Ger)
Age 25 (07.08.95)
Defensive midfielder and a regular in 2017-18, although he has been unlucky with injuries since. Can also fill in at centre-back if needed.

Stefan ILSANKER
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
Age 31 (18.05.89)
Likely starter as one of the defensive midfielders. Played twice at Euro 2016. At one point, contemplated goalkeeping before switching to outfield.



Reinhold RANFTL
LASK
Age 29 (24.01.92)
Right midfielder. Given his debut at the age of 27, he made several appearances last year. A rarity in that he has spent his entire career in Austria.

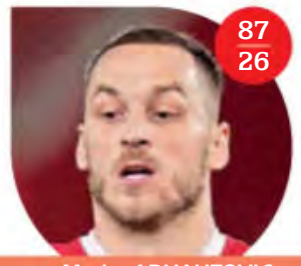


Louis SCHAUB
Luzern (Sui)
Age 26 (29.12.94)
Attacking midfielder who has made sporadic appearances since 2016. Survived a car accident which killed his father, Fred Schaub, in 2003.

Xaver SCHLAGER
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 23 (28.09.97)
Another Red Bull product, raised at feeder club Liefering and then Salzburg, he has impressed since his Austria debut in 2018. Boyhood Arsenal supporter.

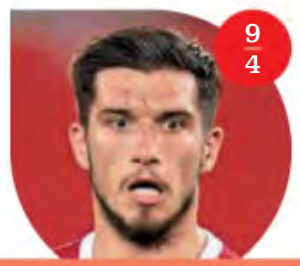
Alessandro SCHOPF
Schalke (Ger)
Age 27 (07.02.94)
Right-sided midfielder. Scored Austria's only goal at Euro 2016 although he has struggled to regain his place after suffering a cruciate ligament injury.

FORWARDS

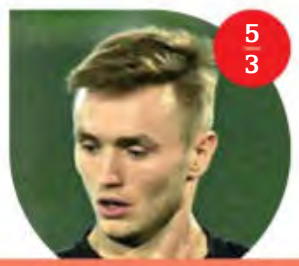


Marko ARNAUTOVIC
Shanghai Port (Chn)
Age 32 (19.04.89)
Flamboyant, gifted and temperamental forward. Austria's most important forward in form but may have lost his competitive edge.

Michael GREGORITSCH
Augsburg (Ger)
Age 27 (18.04.94)
In the squad since 2016, although his recent form is a worry as the goals have dried up this season at Augsburg. His father coaches the Under-21s.



Adrian GRBIC
Lorient (Fra)
Age 24 (04.08.96)
Handed his Austria debut last September, he has turned into a useful option off the bench and scored in three successive appearances last November.



Sasa KALAJDZIC
Stuttgart (Ger)
Age 23 (07.07.97)
The tallest player in the Bundesliga, though he is far from being an old-fashioned target man and has excellent ability on the ground.

Marcel SABITZER
RB Leipzig (Ger)
Age 27 (17.03.94)
Very much a product of the Red Bull system, having played for Salzburg and RB Leipzig. Linked with a move to the Premier League in the summer.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Daniel BACHMANN (Watford, Eng)
DEFENDERS Marco FRIEDL (Werder Bremen, Ger), Stefan POSCH (Hoffenheim, Ger), Gernot TRAUNER (LASK), Maximilian WOBER (Red Bull Salzburg)
MIDFIELDERS Yusuf DEMIR (Rapid Vienna), Konrad LAIMER (RB Leipzig, Ger) *injury*, Valentino LAZARO (Borussia Monchengladbach, Ger)
FORWARDS Karim ONISIWO (Mainz, Ger), Ercan KARA (Rapid Vienna)

The best in the world

Can Belgium live up to their No.1 FIFA ranking?

In 2016 Belgium were dark horses to win Euro 2016, but Wales and Hal Robson-Kanu stunned the Red Devils in the quarter-finals. Then-coach Marc Wilmots took the blame. His second-half introduction of Marouane Fellaini to beef up the team came too little too late against Wales' astute 3-5-2 formation. Four years on, and history comes calling again for the Red Devils. After two quarter-final exits at major finals and a bronze medal at the last World Cup, this summer represents a seminal moment for Belgium's golden generation: can they at last win a marquee tournament?

Under Roberto Martinez's guidance, the world's No.1 ranked country has become a formidable team. His players are in tune with his 3-4-3 formation. In qualifying, Belgium scored more goals than any other nation and only conceded three; another joint-record low. They no longer slip up against weaker opposition and can be imposing against heavyweights. In the most recent Nations League campaign, the Belgians were imperious against both England and Denmark to progress to the competition's final four. Kevin De Bruyne and Romelu Lukaku have been in excellent form this season and will be important players in getting Belgium across the line.

But there are concerns across the team. At the back, central defenders Jan Vertonghen, Toby Alderweireld and Thomas Vermaelen, all in their 30s, are in the twilight of their careers. An ageing defence is never a good launchpad to win a major competition. In January, Axel Witsel tore his Achilles tendon with club Borussia Dortmund. His purported replacement, Leander Dendoncker from Wolves, has yet to convince. Skilful Leicester City midfielders Dennis Praet and Youri Tielemans both thrive higher up the pitch. At 24, Tielemans is developing into a future leader.

> Under Roberto Martinez, the world's No.1 ranked nation has become a formidable team

However, there is no like-for-like replacement for Eden Hazard, whose injuries have kept him out for much of the season at Real Madrid. The Belgian has failed to bring his A-game to the Spanish capital and last played for Belgium in November 2019. If fit, he's still a shoo-in in Martinez's starting XI, but doubts remain.

Ageing back-line... Vertonghen and Alderweireld

At the World Cup, Martinez's team demonstrated that they have nurtured a winning mentality, notwithstanding a subdued last-four exit against France. In July, they could meet the world champions again in a do-or-die semi-final. Everything will have to click to reach the final and emulate the silver medal of Euro 1980 when West Germany's Horst Hrubesch broke Belgian hearts. Martinez, in the face of sky-high expectations, minimises Belgium's title credentials, but that won't do. On July 11, the Spaniard and his players are expected to be at Wembley.

Samindra Kunti

ROBERTO MARTINEZ

How has your team evolved since 2018?
I think we have improved in the competitive nature of having three players per position. It is becoming harder to reduce our list to 23 players. Everyone is growing, developing and progressing. In our last game of our qualification campaign, we were able to make a lot of changes and maintain our level. That's been the biggest sign of evolution since the World Cup.

So, for this so-called "golden generation", it's not quite now or never then?
I haven't looked at it that way. When you split the team into individuals and look at what they have given to the national team: to be close to 100 caps, to get bronze in a World Cup, qualifying with 30 points, being No.1 in the world...there are many signs that it has been an incredible contribution. Winning a major tournament sometimes comes down to small details, things you cannot control. Looking back, many teams never won a major tournament – the Brazil of '82, Netherlands of Johan Cruyff. There are many examples of nations that had incredible inspiration without winning a tournament. We want to be as good as we can and make the fans proud of this team.

No.1 ranked... Belgium

Kevin De Bruyne continues to be so consistent. Is he the perfect playmaker?
He is a reference in terms of understanding systems or playing on different stages. He is a playmaker who can play behind the striker or in front of the back four or even a back three. He can be a complete distributor of the ball. To be able to find a pass before anyone can see it makes him unique.

Does the age of your top defenders worry you ahead of Euro 2020?
No, it doesn't worry me. It's a nice challenge to have. We have probably had the best four centre-halves that Belgian football has ever had in the same generation: Thomas Vermaelen, Toby Alderweireld, Jan Vertonghen and Vincent Kompany. The reality is that they were not going to play until they are 100. What we have done for the last four years is to try to get as many young centre-halves so that they can learn from these footballers. It will be evident that after this tournament these players will retire, so we need to be ready.

You tend to play a 3-4-3. How has that formation evolved with the Belgium national team?
I think systems are not important; the way of playing is important. Are we the team that want to be on the ball, do we want to be aggressive to win it back as quick as we can, and from that point use individual talent in a balanced and structured way? I just felt the 3-4-3 helped certain individuals to become more balanced and to have a bigger effect on the game. But there will be moments we have to change the system: we need to develop players that are flexible, that can play different systems, that see the game by space, decisions and time rather than just systems.

Samindra Kunti

Perfect playmaker... Kevin De Bruyne

TACTICS

Masters of 3-4-3

During the 2018 World Cup qualifiers, Roberto Martinez switched his formation from a 4-3-3 to a 3-4-3 and the Red Devils have never looked back since, with all the players in the squad harnessing a fine understanding of what Martinez's system of choice requires, resulting in a unit that is both clinical up front and solid at the back. Once upon a time, Belgium played blue-collar football in a 4-4-2 formation, but today they boast a flamboyant style with an abundance of talent, who collectively smashed 40 goals past their opponents in the qualification campaign.

The back three lack mobility, but wing-back Thomas Meunier can drop back. Midfield metronome Kevin De Bruyne keeps the team ticking. On the left, Eden Hazard, if fit, can roam around, with Romelu Lukaku and super sub Michy Batshuayi providing the goals. But what happens when the A-listers fail to ignite? Revert to a base 4-3-3? Martinez doesn't have a real Plan B. Former favourites Mousa Dembele and Marouane Fellaini have both retired and the next generation, as recent friendlies demonstrated, isn't ready.

Fitness race... Eden Hazard

Top scorer... Romelu Lukaku

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 3
v **Greece**
(h, Brussels)
Jun 6
v **Croatia**
(h, Brussels)

Russia return... Belgium played their last two World Cup matches in St. Petersburg

GROUP GAMES
Jun 12
v **Russia**
(St. Petersburg)
Jun 17
v **Denmark**
(Copenhagen)
Jun 21
v **Finland**
(St. Petersburg)

THE VIEW FROM BELGIUM

"Many people in Belgium expect the Red Devils to be European champions this summer. I am not that optimistic. Older teams nearly never win big tournaments and especially not after a hard season. The defence is too old. Axel Witsel will be missed and Eden Hazard remains a question mark."
Francois Colin, dewitteduivel.com

"I expect them to win the tournament because it will probably be one of the last chances. This generation will have a shot as well in Qatar 2022. It won't be the strongest squad possible, but they will have one of the best teams and are able to beat everyone. They will do it."
Benoit Delhateur, RTBF Sports

Technical director... Martinez was recently promoted within the Belgian FA

COACH

Roberto MARTINEZ (Spa)
Age 47 (13.07.73)
Appointed August 2016

A surprise appointment to succeed Marc Wilmots, Roberto Martinez's previous international experience was limited to a Europa League run with Everton, but he quickly settled down in Belgium and transformed the national team en route to bronze at the 2018 World Cup. The Spaniard excels at man-management and can spring a tactical surprise, but his communication is not always as transparent as it should be. Even so, living in Waterloo, Martinez has taken a liking to Belgian culture and extended his contract until 2022.

THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

Koen CASTEELS
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 28 (25.06.92)
A prodigy at youth level and currently captaining his club. Underrated at home, just a single cap to date in last year's win over Iceland.

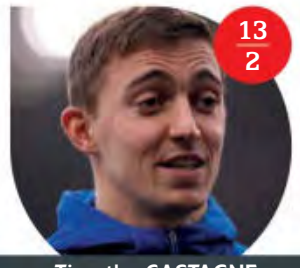
Thibaut COURTOIS
Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 28 (11.05.92)
World-class and undisputed No.1 for both club and country, but the 6ft 7in goalkeeper is sometimes prone to high-profile blunders.

Simon MIGNOLET
Club Brugge
Age 33 (06.03.88)
Eternal second best in the national team. He left Liverpool in 2019 to get playing time at Club Brugge and won the Belgian league title in his first season.

DEFENDERS

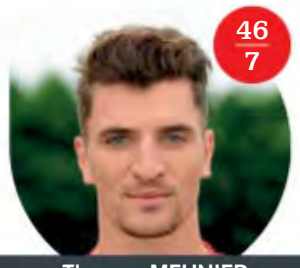
Toby ALDERWEIRELD
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 32 (02.03.89)
Been rotated with Eric Dier and Davinson Sanchez at his club. On his day, consistent and assured. Youngest of the veterans at the back.

Dedryck BOYATA
Hertha Berlin (Ger)
Age 30 (28.11.90)
A 2011 debut in a 4-4 draw with Austria. Deputised for Vincent Kompany at the 2018 World Cup group stage. Quick and physically strong.

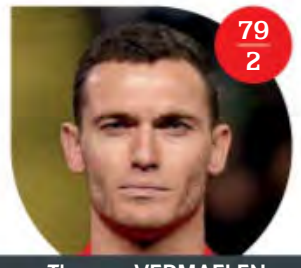


Timothy CASTAGNE
Leicester City (Eng)
Age 25 (05.12.95)
A number six at youth level, he couples versatility and lung-busting energy with simplicity. Part of Atalanta's European fairy tale before moving to England.

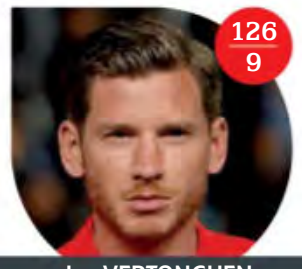
Jason DENAYER
Lyon (Fra)
Age 25 (28.06.95)
Labelled the new Kompany early on, a journeyman at club level but now settled superbly at Lyon. Commanding and composed.



Thomas MEUNIER
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Age 29 (12.09.91)
From postman and player in the Belgian third division to Paris Saint-Germain, Dortmund and the World Cup. Reliable and has lots of stamina. He drops deep.

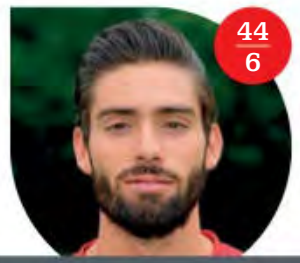


Thomas VERMAELEN
Vissel Kobe (Jap)
Age 35 (14.11.85)
Outstanding at Euro 2016, but in the twilight of career. He didn't feature for Belgium for a year and a half due to travel restrictions in Japan.

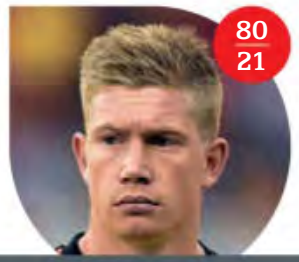


Jan VERTONGHEN
Benfica (Por)
Age 33 (24.04.87)
Most-capped player of all time with tons of experience. Ageing and less mobile but in form, tactically astute and accurate in his build-up play.

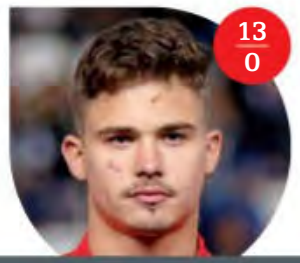
MIDFIELDERS



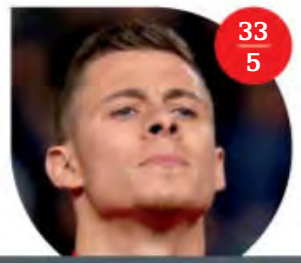
Yannick CARRASCO
Atletico Madrid (Spa)
Age 27 (04.09.93)
Back in the Spanish capital following his Dalian Pro adventure in China. Can be inconsistent, but tenacious and brilliant on his day.



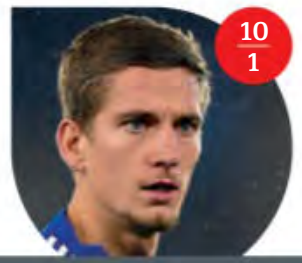
Kevin DE BRUYNE
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 29 (28.06.91)
Superlative midfielder with passing ability, skill set and vision second to none. Brings a winning mentality from Manchester City.



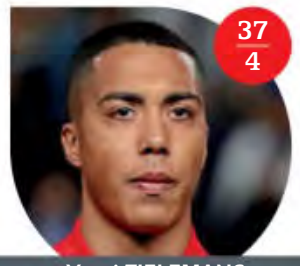
Leander DENDONCKER
Wolverhampton Wanderers (Eng)
Age 25 (15.04.95)
A sturdy frame, physicality, good stamina and positional awareness. Utility man at Wolves, but is he good enough to replace the injured Witsel?



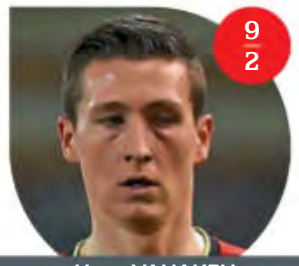
Thorgan HAZARD
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Age 28 (29.03.93)
One of the three brothers. He plays the wing-back role in more advanced positions than his competitors for the spot. Impressed in qualifying.



Dennis PRAET
Leicester City (Eng)
Age 26 (14.05.94)
Oscillating fortunes under Brendan Rodgers with injury and competition for places. Mature, skilful and versatile, he can even play the Mertens role.

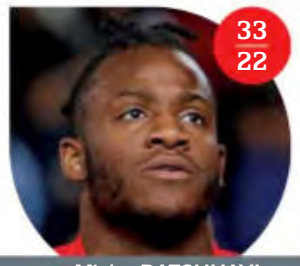


Youri TIELEMANS
Leicester City (Eng)
Age 23 (07.05.97)
Anderlecht youth product and a future leader who can play as a No.6 or No.8. Had another wonderful season in the Premier League with Leicester City.

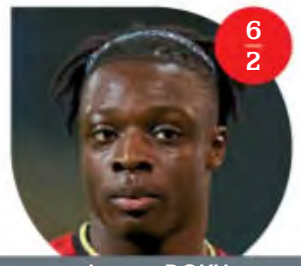


Hans VANAKEN
Club Brugge
Age 28 (24.08.92)
A difficult season at his club with injuries and COVID-19, but a real midfield metronome when on song. So far has been a bit lightweight for Belgium.

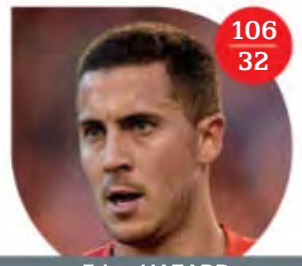
FORWARDS



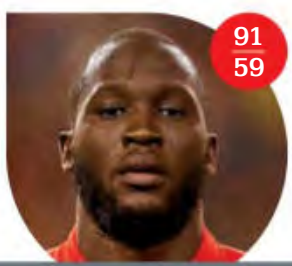
Michy BATSHUAYI
Crystal Palace (Eng)
Age 27 (02.10.93)
A journeyman, often benched at club level, but a super sub for the national team scoring 22 goals in just 33 appearances.



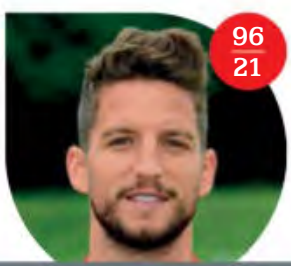
Jeremy DOKU
Rennes (Fra)
Age 18 (18.05.02)
From the Anderlecht youth academy and part of the next generation. Quick, tenacious and dangerous, but doesn't always deliver a final product.



Eden HAZARD
Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 30 (07.01.91)
National team captain and unstoppable at his best, but sidelined for far too long due to injuries. Last featured for Belgium in 2019 v Cyprus.



Romelu LUKAKU
Internazionale
Age 27 (13.05.93)
Belgium's all-time top scorer, who has excelled on the front foot under Antonio Conte at Inter following a difficult time at Manchester United.



Dries MERTENS
Napoli (Ita)
Age 33 (06.05.87)
Fan favourite, pint-sized winger for Belgium but a striker in Italy. He delivered too little at the last two major finals, but has a fine connection with Lukaku.

Leandro TROSSARD
Brighton & Hove Albion (Eng)
Age 26 (04.12.94)
Debuted last year in Nations League. Second generation of Belgians to cross the Channel. Cool and dynamic. Won the title at Genk before joining Brighton.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Thomas KAMINSKI (Blackburn Rovers, Eng)
DEFENDERS Sebastiaan BORNAUW (Cologne, Ger), Brandon MECHELE (Club Brugge), Zinho VANHEUSDEN (Standard Liege)
MIDFIELDERS Nacer CHADLI (Istanbul Basaksehir, Tur), Charles DE KETELAERE (Club Brugge), Thomas FOKET (Reims, Fra), Albert Sambi LOKONGA (Anderlecht), Alexis SAELEMAEKERS (Milan, Ita), Yari VERSCHAEREN (Anderlecht), Axel WITSEL (Borussia Dortmund, Ger) *injury*
FORWARDS Christian BENTEKE (Crystal Palace, Eng), Adnan JANUZAJ (Real Sociedad, Spa)

One last hurrah

Croatia captain Luka Modric will lead his team to a final major tournament this summer

Ever since Croatia debuted in the Euro '96 qualifiers, they have been absent only once from the final tournament (Euro 2000 in Belgium and the Netherlands). Reaching their sixth Euro finals, as well as five of the six World Cups, is a remarkable achievement for a relatively young and small country of approximately four million inhabitants.

And while the Croatian national team has finished on the podium twice at the World Cup – third place at France '98 and runners-up in Russia in 2018 – they have only advanced three times to the knockout stages of the European Championship – in 1996, 2008 and 2016. After the sensational success of World Cup 2018, now even more is expected at the Euros, starting with an easy walkthrough to the knockout round and a place in the quarter-finals at least.

Zlatko Dalic, the national team coach, has a mixture of experienced and new, young, energetic players at his disposal. There will likely be 13 players present in the squad from World Cup 2018 for the forthcoming Euros, which emphasises the consistency of a playing style and team selection. Given this fact, Croatia will yet again be dangerous opponents for any team that they encounter this summer.

This European Championship will be a farewell, firstly for the great maestro Luka Modric, certainly for Milan Badelj, and probably for stoppers Dejan Lovren and Domagoj Vida, as well as their most efficient forward Ivan Perisic. Croatia supporters can count on these players' ambition to say goodbye to the big stage by going out with a bang, in one final attempt to bring their country into euphoria once again, just as they did after Russia 2018.

Coach Dalic, the players, and the entire football nation, expect Croatia to advance from the group, and from there they are capable of beating anyone. This generation has played against England three times – in the 2018 World Cup semi-finals and twice in the Nations League – so they have already shown that they can at least fight equally with the English. Against Scotland and the Czech Republic they will take on the role of favourites.

Runners-up...Croatia lost to France in the 2018 World Cup final

The only thing that will worry Dalic is the condition of his players as the final preparations near. The best and most important squad members play at some of the strongest European clubs, so it is uncertain as to whether they will be carrying injuries or how fatigued they will be come the end of the season. Croatia is only a small country – the Croatian First Football League would be considered third-rank in Europe.

However, it is an excellent league to develop young players. It is interesting that there will be at least five players from the Croatian top flight in the final squad for the Euros – in Russia there were just two, Dominik Livakovic and Filip Bradaric.

Zdravko Reic

> The nation expect Croatia to advance from the group, and from there they are capable of beating anyone

ZLATKO DALIC

What are your reflections on Croatia's performances at the 2018 World Cup?
It was just an amazing, wonderful and unforgettable month for each player, coach and staff member, culminating with an unbelievable welcome that we received in Zagreb, with more than half a million people on the streets to greet us. I will cherish every game and every moment of that run to the final for the rest of my life, and it will always stay the most special tournament of my career. For a country of four million people to reach the World Cup final, that was just a fascinating story, and we did it in style, playing an attractive style of football with a lot of passion, emotion and togetherness.

How has your team evolved since the 2018 World Cup?
Our team is quite different now. We lost several key members of that squad because they retired from the national team – players such as Rakitic, Mandzukic, Subasic and Corluka. Obviously, without them, you lose some of the quality and experience that we had in Russia. On the other hand, this is a chance for some new names, for younger players who are hungry, to show they can keep Croatia among the elite teams.

Final send-off... Luka Modric

Luka Modric remains key. What's the secret to his longevity?
Luka is just an amazing, amazing player. His dedication and work rate is second to none, and that's why he defies logic when it comes to age and performance. He works very hard to be in the best shape. He has unparalleled passion for football and still enjoys it as much as he did when he was a kid. When you combine such physical preparation, strong mind and great desire, you get a player who is – at 35 – still one of the best, if not the best, midfielder in the world. For us, Luka is a national treasure and we'll try to get him to play as long as he wants because he is indispensable as a player and as a leader.

What is your assessment of Group D with England, Czech Republic and Scotland?
I would guess that every coach at the Euros will say that his group is very difficult – and that's true for us as well. We have two host teams, England and Scotland, and Czech Republic who are playing well. England are obviously one of the best teams in the world and one of the favourites to win the Euros – they're playing at home, they have a great squad and I respect their head coach Gareth Southgate. We understand it'll be difficult to start at Wembley against England, but we're ready for the challenge.

Longevity...Modric made his Croatia debut in 2006

Are Croatia among the favourites to win this summer's competition?
I don't think we're in the first line of favourites, but I think there are around ten teams who can beat anybody on a given night, and can dream about winning the Euros – and we're among those ten teams. In one game, with our quality and desire, we can beat anyone. Knowing how happy and proud we made our nation in 2018, we have fantastic motivation to try to repeat something similar and make people smile.

Samindra Kunti

TACTICS

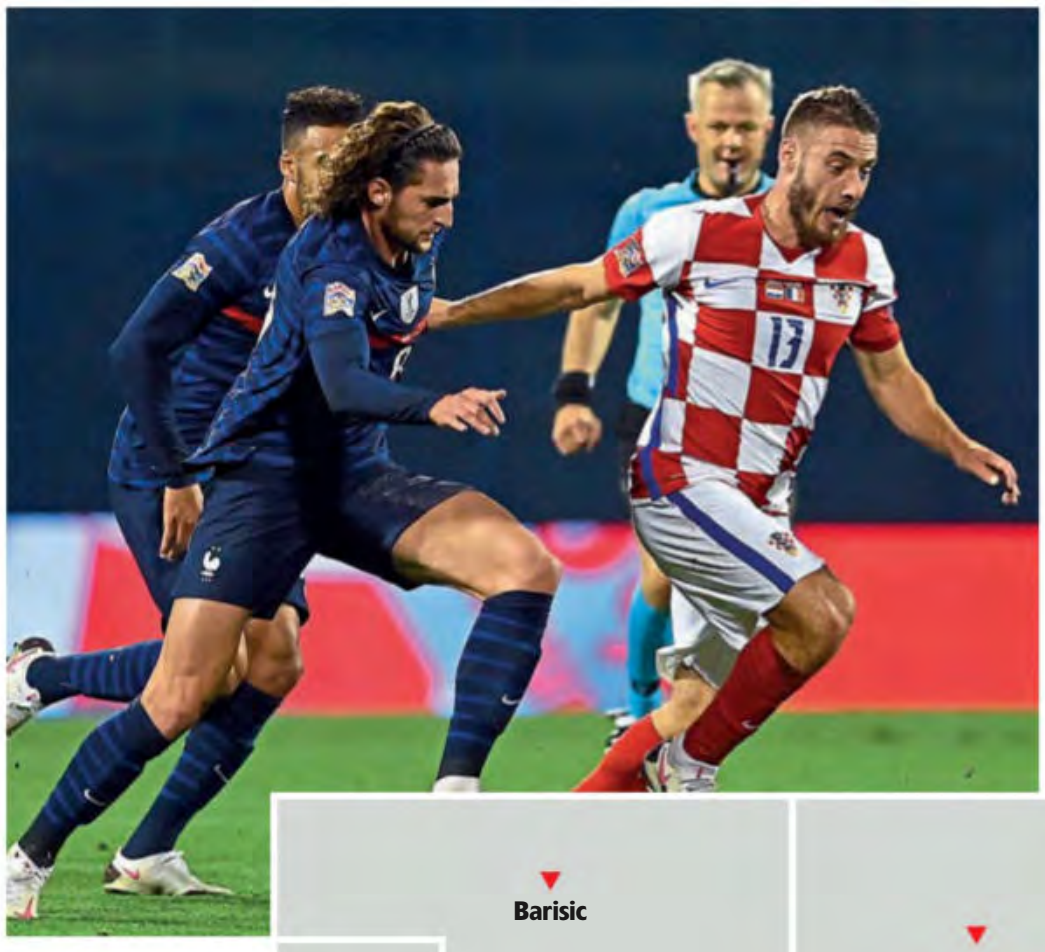
Experience with injection of youth

Since Dalic became coach of Croatia, his basic idea has been a positive, aggressive, attacking 4-2-3-1 formation with two offensive full-backs, which easily turns into a 4-3-3 system. It was in this style that he guided them to the final of the World Cup in 2018, and easily qualified for Euro 2020.

An outstanding centre-back pairing of Lovren and Vida still remains crucial, while the midfield trio has been updated from Modric-Rakitic-Brozovic in Russia, to Modric-Vlasic-Brozovic. Nikola Vlasic, the new, fresh force in the current trio, has a very offensive role and has grown into the partnership.

The key man is Modric and, although he is 35 years old, he is still the initiator of every action on the pitch. He and Brozovic will line up in front of the back four, as long as the captain remains fit.

Compared to the squad in Russia, a new generation has emerged. Alongside Vlasic came Josip Brekalo, Mario Pasalic and Filip Uremovic, while Bruno Petkovic has joined the attack. The Dinamo Zagreb forward is not a classic centre-forward, but more of an attacking midfielder; a refined dribbler and outstanding assister with an eye for goal.



Rakitic replacement... Nikola Vlasic

One to watch... Bruno Petkovic

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 1
v **Armenia**
(h, Osijek)
Jun 6
v **Belgium**
(a, Brussels)

Rematch...Croatia faced England at Wembley in 2018

GROUP GAMES
Jun 13
v **England**
(London)
Jun 18
v **Czech Republic**
(Glasgow)
Jun 22
v **Scotland**
(Glasgow)

THE VIEW FROM CROATIA

"England are favourites. Croatia's hopes largely depend on Luka Modric. He is almost 36 years old and, regardless of his physical condition, the question is how ready will he be at the end of the season? He is key and Dalic will not have the luxury to substitute him. Success would be the quarter-finals."

Igor Stimac, former international

"Our team is capable of coming up with another miracle against the European football giants, because coach Dalic has never had a wider range of player at his disposal. He is covered in all positions, with almost any kind of player, and the youngsters are hungry for affirmation."

Robert Sola, Sportske novosti editor

Zlatko Dalic...he was a defensive midfielder in his playing days

COACH

Zlatko DALIC
Age 54 (26.10.66)
Appointed October 2017

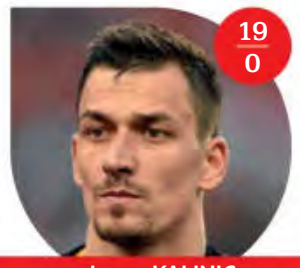
Dalic was nominated, quite suddenly, at a time when there were only theoretical possibilities of Croatia actually being able to qualify for the 2018 World Cup. They needed a win in Kiev against Ukraine and afterwards success in the play-offs versus Greece, but he achieved key victories.

Unsurprisingly, after the success of Russia 2018, he was given a new deal by the Croatian Football Association until the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, with a commitment of €1 million a year – a much higher salary compared to previous national team coaches.

THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

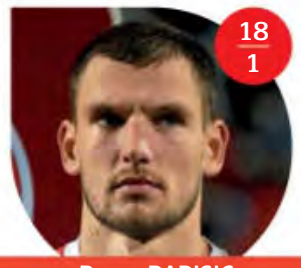


Lovre KALINIC
Hajduk Split
Age 31 (03.04.90)
The 6ft 7in keeper commands his area. Didn't play regularly at Aston Villa, so returned on loan to his home club to regain his national team spot back.

Dominik LIVAKOVIC
Dinamo Zagreb
Age 26 (09.01.95)
Croatia's No.1. Secure and cold-blooded – even in the toughest of situations. Has great reflexes and reactions, especially in one-on-ones.

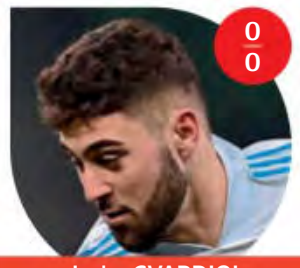
Simon SLUGA
Luton Town (Eng)
Age 28 (17.03.93)
Third goalkeeper, exclusively at the expense of Ivo Grbic who is playing back-up to Jan Oblak at Atletico Madrid. As Sluga plays regularly, he should get the nod.

DEFENDERS

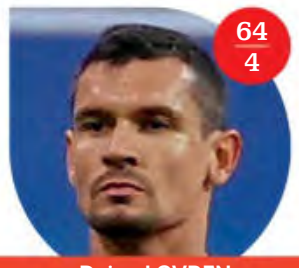


Borna BARISIC
Rangers (Sco)
Age 28 (10.11.92)
Emerged during qualification and enjoyed a title-winning season at Rangers. A very offensive and direct left-back with a quality left foot.

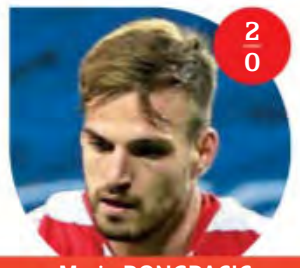
Duje CALETA-CAR
Marseille (Fra)
Age 24 (17.09.96)
Accomplished central defender, comparable to Gerard Pique. Strong in the air with great anticipation. Croatia look more balanced with him in defence.



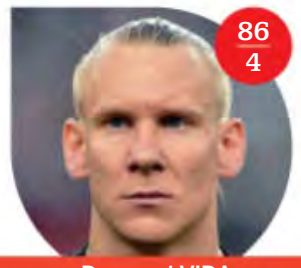
Josko GVARDIOL
Dinamo Zagreb
Age 19 (23.01.02)
Uncapped centre-back or left-back, and the great hope of Croatian football. Sold to RB Leipzig for €16 million, but returned on loan to Dinamo.



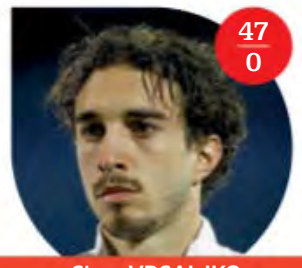
Dejan LOVREN
Zenit St. Petersburg (Rus)
Age 31 (05.07.89)
Ex-Liverpool centre-back who is powerful, experienced and strong in the air – both defensively and offensively. Owns a luxury hotel on the Croatian coast.



Marin PONGRACIC
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 23 (11.09.97)
German-born centre-back who started his career in Bayern's academy. Recently contracted mononucleosis and COVID – his recovery is eagerly awaited.



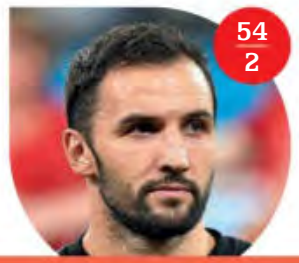
Domagoj VIDA
Besiktas (Tur)
Age 32 (29.04.89)
Central defender, courageous, excellent in duels and very experienced. Off the pitch he owns a black pig farm in his village Donji Miholjac.



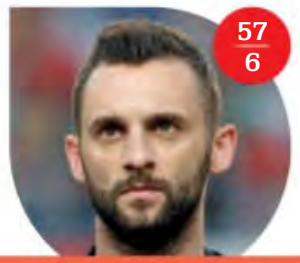
Sime VRSALJKO
Atletico Madrid (Spa)
Age 29 (10.01.92)
The attacking right-back is a very important player for Croatia, but has been plagued by knee injuries in recent years. Has lots of religious tattoos.

MIDFIELDERS

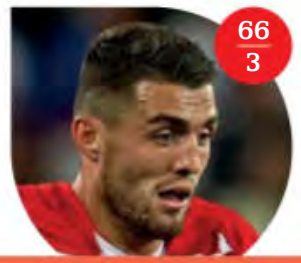
Filip UREMOVIC
Rubin Kazan (Rus)
Age 24 (11.02.97)
Central defender, but filled in at right-back during the Nations League. Fresh new blood for the defence and lined up to replace Vida and Lovren in the future.



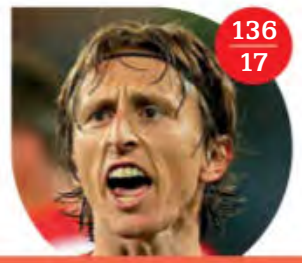
Milan BADELJ
Genoa (Ita)
Age 32 (25.02.89)
Defensive midfielder with outstanding anticipation. Reads the play well and has a good overview of the game, but is definitely in a declining phase.



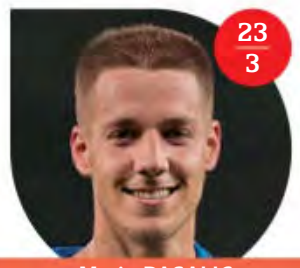
Marcelo BROZOVIC
Internazionale (Ita)
Age 28 (16.11.92)
One of Croatia's key players. An outstanding distributor and tireless runner who complements Modric perfectly. A big fan of pool, pinball, darts and table football.



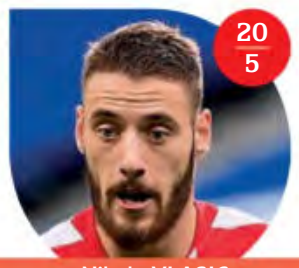
Mateo KOVACIC
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 27 (06.05.94)
A talented, creative midfielder, but often does not provide as much as is expected of him. Was considered the natural successor to Ivan Rakitic. Very religious.



Luka MODRIC
Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 35 (09.09.85)
Croatia's greatest player of all time and recognised as the best player in the world in 2018 after winning the Ballon d'Or. The heartbeat of the team.

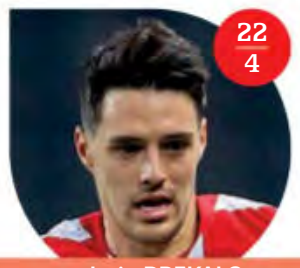


Mario PASALIC
Atalanta (Ita)
Age 26 (09.02.95)
German-born offensive midfielder with huge potential. Developed at Hajduk Split and has since been on the books of Chelsea, Monaco and Milan.

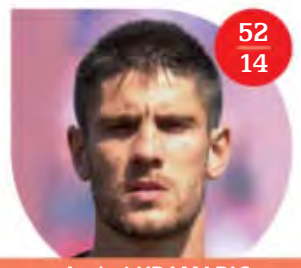


Nikola VLASIC
CSKA Moscow (Rus)
Age 23 (04.10.97)
The best young player in Croatia – a powerful dribbler with a sense of where the goal is. Always gives 100 per cent. His father is a former decathlete.

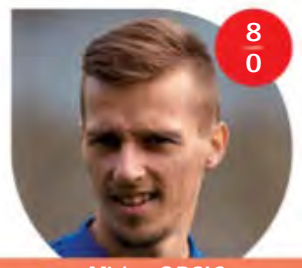
FORWARDS



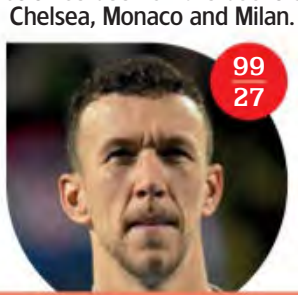
Josip BREKALO
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 22 (23.06.98)
Winger, but can also fill in as a full-back if necessary. Top technician, penetrating runner and very effective. Has a knack of scoring important goals.



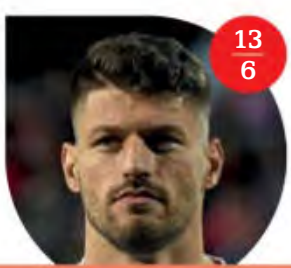
Andrej KRAMARIC
Hoffenheim (Ger)
Age 29 (19.06.91)
A true opportunist striker who needs very little space to shoot. Usually joins the game from the bench. Has his own fan club in the Czech village of Kramy.



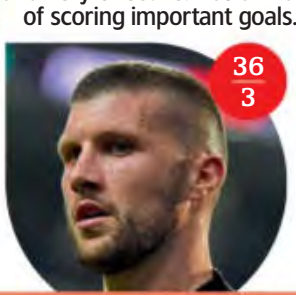
Mislav ORSIC
Dinamo Zagreb
Age 28 (29.12.92)
Right-footed, pacy winger who plays mostly on the left. Dinamo's all-time top scorer in European competitions, inlcuding his hat-trick against Tottenham.



Ivan PERISIC
Internazionale (Ita)
Age 32 (02.02.89)
Experienced forward and the nation's highest goalscorer in the current squad. Direct, responsible, helps defensively and is equally good on both wings.



Bruno PETKOVIC
Dinamo Zagreb
Age 26 (16.09.94)
A player with extraordinary technical ability, an excellent dribbler and able to escape opponents in small spaces. Yet to prove himself for Croatia.



Ante REBIC
Milan (Ita)
Age 27 (21.09.93)
Left-winger, best remembered for his goal in the 1-0 win over Argentina at the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Very aggressive, stubborn and a true sprinter.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Ivo GRBIC (Atletico Madrid, Spa)
DEFENDERS Domagoj BRADARIC (Lille, Fra), Tin JEDVAJ (Bayer Leverkusen, Ger), Josip JURANOVIC (Legia Warsaw, Pol), Dario MELNJAK (Caykur Rizespor, Tur), Mile SKORIC (Osijek)
MIDFIELDERS Toma BASIC (Bordeaux, Fra), Marko ROG (Cagliari, Ita)
FORWARDS Ante BUDIMIR (Osasuna, Spa), Kristijan LOVRIC (Gorica)

Beating expectations

The Czechs are capable of causing upsets

Gone are some of the star names like Petr Cech and Tomas Rosicky but, five years on from Euro 2016, a much-changed Czech squad is back at football's top table.

Much of the credit belongs to coach Jaroslav Silhavy, who picked up the pieces following a disappointing 2018 World Cup qualification campaign. Despite low expectations, the Plzen native has quietly remade the team, emphasising team spirit and a strong work ethic. The rewards have been a place at Euro 2020 and promotion to the Nations League's top tier.

The immediate impact that central midfielder Tomas Soucek and right-back Vladimir Coufal have made in England's Premier League has further boosted Czech self-confidence, as have the impressive results of the West Ham duo's former team-mates at Slavia Prague in Europe.

The rest of the defence is an issue, with a scarcity of quality options at centre-back, and a lack of first-team football at Sevilla for their first-choice goalkeeper Tomas Vaclik. But on the plus side, young striker Patrik Schick has the potential to be one of the tournament's top players, and a well-balanced midfield carries a significant threat of its own.

Most Czechs see finishing third, ahead of Scotland, as the likeliest route out of Group D this summer, and aren't discouraged by last year's home and away losses to Steve Clarke's side, both of which took place in unusual circumstances.

> Most Czechs see finishing third, ahead of Scotland, as the likeliest route out of Group D this summer

The nation's preparations for Euro 2020 have been severely affected by COVID-19. Since autumn of last year, the Central European nation has had some of the world's highest infection rates, and Silhavy's squad has not been spared the disruption.

In September's Nations League game against Scotland, an outbreak forced the Czechs to field an entirely new team, overseen by Under-18 coach David Holoubek. Silhavy also missed out on the return game after testing positive for COVID himself. The Czechs narrowly lost both matches but still topped their Nations League group – an outcome Silhavy describes as a "miracle".

Surprise package... celebrating the shock 2-1 win over England in Prague

The Czech Republic's other Group D rivals are also familiar. The Czechs were drawn in the same group as Croatia at the 2016 tournament, where the teams drew 2-2, and were in the same Euro 2020 qualification group as England, where a 5-0 thrashing at Wembley was followed by a shock 2-1 win in Prague.

Silhavy admits that his team can't compete with Europe's elite, and says he sees Euro 2020 mainly as a chance to learn. As the victory over England showed, however, the Czechs at their best are capable of causing major surprises.

Sam Beckwith

JAROSLAV SILHAVY

Were you satisfied with the way your team performed in the qualifiers?
We have been getting better. We showed it when we qualified for League A of the Nations League and earlier for Euro 2020.

What is the philosophy of your team?
I hope that the players enjoy playing for the national team. They have to represent the Czech Republic with pride and joy. That is the most important thing. That's paramount. In the past, the Czech Republic has often been accused of playing defensive football, but in the Nations League the national team was attack-minded. Fans want to watch goals and chances. And we try to give it to them. But it does not mean that you can omit the defensive part from the game. The match against England, which we won 2-1, was the example of how we want to play our football.

Does your team play a 4-3-3 formation rather than a 4-1-4-1?
We don't play any of these systems, but the shape of the formation before the match is not essential. The players move on the pitch – strikers must defend and defenders have to attack. Hard work of all of our players is crucial to achieve a success.

Qualifiers...Czech Republic finished six points behind England as the runners-up

You were assistant for the national team under Karel Bruckner and a generation of players like Pavel Nedved. Has that helped you to navigate your new role?
Karel Bruckner is an excellent coach and a magnificent man. I was excited that I could learn from him and be with such a successful team.

Is in-form midfielder Tomas Soucek key to the balance of your team?
Yes, he has demonstrated that both in the national team as well as in the Premier League. He has been improving thanks to his moral fibre. He is modest and hard-working. I am sure that he will continue to improve.

What does Patrik Schick offer?
Goals. Patrik is a very good striker. He's been unlucky because of injury. I hope he remains healthy and plays well in the Bundesliga.

Soucek and Schick aside, there are no major stars in the squad. Does that imply the collective always comes first?
Team work is essential. And who knows? Maybe some new stars will shine at Euro 2020.

What is the Czech Republic's ambition at Euro 2020?
We want to qualify from the group and reach the knockout stage. Then everything is possible. That is the first step, but we know that it will be difficult.

This will be the Czech Republic's seventh consecutive qualification for the Euros since the breakup of Czechoslovakia. What is the secret to this consistency?
The qualifying campaign for a European Championship is easier than for the World Cup, but we will try to make our statistics even better this year by qualifying for Qatar 2022.

Samindra Kunti

Key man... Tomas Soucek

TACTICS

High energy, high pressing

Under Jaroslav Silhavy, the Czech Republic play an energetic high-pressing game, flooding forward in an attempt to win the ball in their opponents' half. Once in possession, a short-passing game is preferred.

Silhavy's favoured formation against stronger opponents is a 4-2-3-1, with playmaker Vladimir Darida and wingers Lukas Provod and Jakub Jankto most likely to be supporting lone striker Patrik Schick. The full-backs, plus midfielders Alex Kral and Tomas Soucek, also like to get forward – as the latter proved with a hat-trick against Estonia in March.

In qualification, the biggest threat came through Jankto. Between them, the left-winger and Schick had a hand in eight of the team's 13 goals.

Central defence is their biggest weak spot, where Silhavy has struggled to find a reliable partner for the omnipresent Ondrej Celustka. Another question he must resolve is how – or if – he will use captain Borek Dockal. The playmaker has struggled since returning from Achilles tendon surgery and was left out of the squad for March's World Cup qualifiers.

If fully fit, 18-year-old Adam Hlozek could be a secret weapon in attack.

Alex Kral...Soucek's midfield partner

Secret weapon... Adam Hlozek

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 4
v **Italy**
(a, Bologna)
Jun 8
v **Albania**
(h, Venue TBC)

Returning...the Czechs were beaten 5-0 on their last visit to Wembley

GROUP GAMES
Jun 14
v **Scotland**
(Glasgow)
Jun 18
v **Croatia**
(Glasgow)
Jun 22
v **England**
(London)

THE VIEW FROM CZECH REPUBLIC

"The Czech Republic should do slightly better than Euro 2016. The atmosphere is much more positive and the coach has tournament experience. He knows the most important thing is team spirit. We also have more players capable of playing at the highest level."

Tomas Radotinsky, O2 TV Sport commentator

"The Czechs definitely won't go to Euro 2020 a defeated team, and I see their chances as pretty good. I think they will progress from their group in second spot. Individually, they're better than Scotland, and Croatia aren't as strong as they were."

Jaromir Bosak, Ceska televize commentator

Former assistant.. Silhavy

COACH

Jaroslav SILHAVY
Age 59 (03.11.61)
Appointed September 2018

Between 2003 and 2009, Silhavy was assistant Czech national team coach and worked under Karel Bruckner at the Euro 2008 tournament. He was appointed national team coach in his own right in September 2018 after being sacked by Slavia Prague – seven months after leading them to the title. He also won the Czech League with Slovan Liberec in 2012.

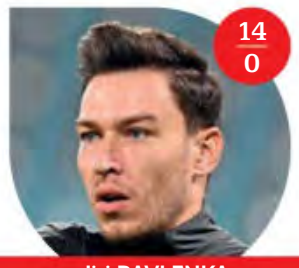
As a player, he holds the record for the most top-flight appearances in the Czechoslovak/Czech League with 465, and won four caps for Czechoslovakia.

THE SQUAD

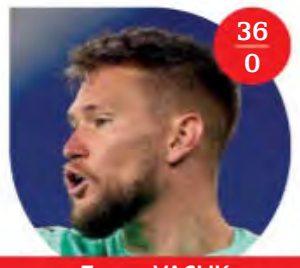
● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

Ondrej KOLAR
Slavia Prague
Age 26 (17.10.94)
Became the Czech League's most expensive goalkeeper when he joined Slavia in 2018. Suffered a fractured sinus in Europa League.

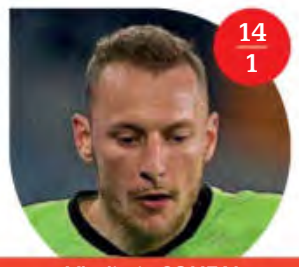


Jiri PAVLENKA
Werder Bremen (Ger)
Age 29 (14.04.92)
A regular starter in Germany since joining Bremen from Slavia Prague back in 2017. Tall, with excellent reflexes. Vaclik's likeliest replacement.

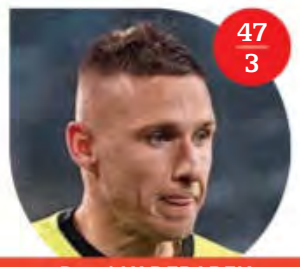


Tomas VACLIK
Sevilla (Spa)
Age 32 (29.03.89)
Good all-round keeper who deputised for Petr Cech at Euro 2016. First-choice in qualification but now out of favour at Sevilla.

Ondrej CELUSTKA
Sparta Prague
Age 31 (18.06.89)
Well-travelled first-choice central defender who played every minute in qualification alongside Soucek. Excellent ball-winner with great timing.

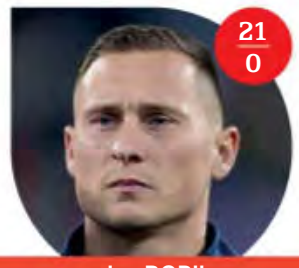


Vladimir COUFAL
West Ham United (Eng)
Age 28 (22.08.92)
Speedy, aggressive right full-back who followed Tomas Soucek from Slavia Prague to West Ham and has made a similar impact there.

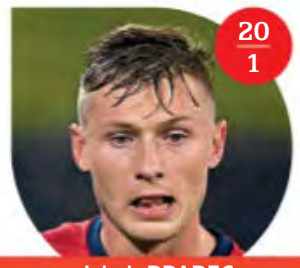


Pavel KADERABEK
Hoffenheim (Ger)
Age 29 (25.04.92)
Pacy, right-sided full-back who began his career as a wide midfielder. Used to be a guaranteed starter but now likely to miss out to Coufal.

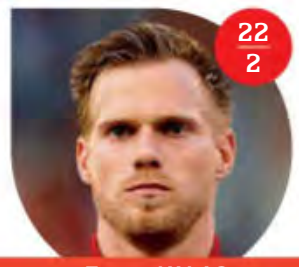
DEFENDERS



Jan BORIL
Slavia Prague
Age 30 (11.01.91)
Uncompromising left-back who captains champions Slavia. Played his entire career in the Czech League. Made his international debut aged 26.



Jakub BRABEC
Viktoria Plzen
Age 28 (06.08.92)
Experienced, intelligent and elegant central defender. Reportedly unsettled at Viktoria Plzen and has struggled with indifferent form this season.



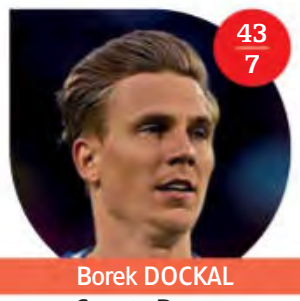
Tomas KALAS
Bristol City (Eng)
Age 27 (15.05.93)
Tough central defender in contention for a starting place. Signed by Chelsea aged 17, but now plays in England's second tier as Bristol City's captain.

David ZIMA
Slavia Prague
Age 20 (08.11.00)
Young central defender. Strong in the air and a good reader of the game. Likely to be included in place of his suspended club team-mate Ondrej Kudela.

MIDFIELDERS

Antonin BARAK
Verona (Ita)
Age 26 (03.12.94)
Left-footed central midfielder with an eye for goal. Possible impact substitute. Overcame a back defect and fatigue syndrome as a teenager.

Vladimir DARIDA
Hertha Berlin (Ger)
Age 30 (08.08.90)
Small, skilful and dynamic No.10. Lost the captaincy in favour of Dockal, but a key player and still captains the side when Dockal doesn't feature.



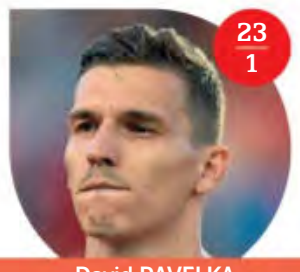
Borek DOCKAL
Sparta Prague
Age 32 (30.09.88)
Experienced playmaker or right-sided midfielder who has struggled to reassert himself after undergoing Achilles surgery in 2019.

Tomas HOLES
Slavia Prague
Age 28 (31.03.93)
Signed by Slavia as a replacement for right-back Vladimir Coufal but now used by club and country as a defensive midfielder.

Jakub JANKTO
Sampdoria (Ita)
Age 25 (19.01.96)
Slender-looking but highly productive left-winger who moved to Italy in his teens. Good at set-pieces. Owns his own esports team.

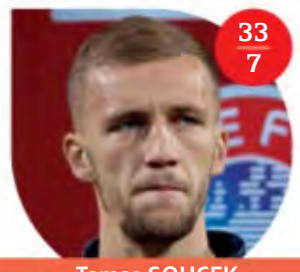
Alex KRAL
Spartak Moscow (Rus)
Age 22 (19.05.98)
Young up-and-coming defensive midfielder who's become a regular starter since making his international debut in 2019. Often linked with English clubs.

Lukas MASOPUST
Slavia Prague
Age 28 (12.02.93)
Tireless right-sided attacking midfielder who, on his day, is difficult to contain. No relation to 1962 Ballon d'Or winner Josef Masopust.



David PAVELKA
Sparta Prague
Age 29 (18.05.91)
Left-footed defensive midfielder who played at Euro 2016. Now back at home after four years with Turkish side Kasimpasa. Good at breaking up play.

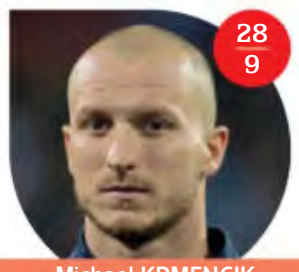
Lukas PROVOD
Slavia Prague
Age 24 (23.10.96)
Versatile and in-form midfielder, among the Czech League's leading providers of assists. Scored against Leicester City in the Europa League.



Tomas SOUCEK
West Ham United (Eng)
Age 26 (27.02.95)
Tall, energetic box-to-box midfielder who has flourished in the Premier League. Absolutely outstanding in the air. Current Czech Player of the Year.

FORWARDS

Adam HLOZEK
Sparta Prague
Age 18 (25.07.02)
Versatile teenage sensation who became the Czech League's youngest-ever scorer in 2019. Recently back from a fractured foot.



Michael KRMENCIK
PAOK (Gre)
Age 28 (15.03.93)
Tall, strong striker who won two league titles with Viktoria Plzen before moving abroad to Belgian side Club Brugge. Sometimes criticised for diving.

Patrik SCHICK
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Age 25 (24.01.96)
Tall, powerful yet elegant striker who, barring injury, is Silhavy's first-choice forward. Back near his best following an unhappy two seasons at Roma.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Tomas KOUBEK (Augsburg, Ger), Ales MANDOUS (Sigma Olomouc)
DEFENDERS Ondrej KUDELA (Slavia Prague) *suspended*, Ales MATEJU (Brescia, Ita), Filip NOVAK (Fenerbahce, Tur)
MIDFIELDERS Ladislav KREJCI (Sparta Prague), Tomas MALINSKY (Mlada Boleslav), Jakub PESEK (Slovan Liberec)
FORWARDS Zdenek ONDRASEK (Viktoria Plzen), Tomas PEKHART (Legia Warsaw, Pol), Matej VYDRA (Burnley, Eng)

Danes eye another fairy-tale story

But they'll need to become less reliant on Eriksen

Look at the list of elite clubs from which Denmark draw their players, among them Barcelona, Internazionale, Chelsea, RB Leipzig, Tottenham Hotspur, Milan and Borussia Dortmund, and it's clear why they should be considered dangerous outsiders for glory at this summer's European Championship. Their starting XI is full of quality and experience, with a genuine star in playmaker Christian Eriksen.

What matters even more is the fiercely strong team bond and work ethic within the squad. It means this Denmark side can be more than just the sum of some impressive parts and can follow previous Danish national teams in over-achieving at a major tournament. The most spectacular example, of course, was the fairy-tale triumph at Euro '92.

For other footballing nations, such history might be a burden. For a small country like Denmark, it will always serve only as an inspiration. They never travel in expectation, merely in hope.

Genuine contenders require some excellence. The 1992 team certainly had that with the dynamic talent of Brian Laudrup, and now there is Eriksen, at the prime age of 29; still with energy in his legs, the ambition in his heart and the wisdom in his boots that comes from winning over 100 international caps.

> Denmark never travel in expectation, merely in hope

Eriksen dazzled for the Danes in the early part of the season even when on the fringes at Internazionale. A return to the regular starting line-up in Serie A coincided with Inter's move to the top of the table. The difference between club and country is that Denmark are too reliant on him for creativity and goals.

He has scored 36 times for the Danes; the next highest tallies in the squad belong to Martin Braithwaite, Yussuf Poulsen and Kasper Dolberg. They are fine forwards, but not exactly prolific.

This reality is why their coach Kasper Hjulmand knows Denmark's strategy must focus on being hard to beat. They possess a strong spine, from goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel through defenders Simon Kjaer and Andreas Christensen to the two holding-midfielders Thomas Delaney and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg. This, along with Eriksen, is the core.

What the Danes require more than anything is fresh impetus. There have long been high hopes for Dolberg, but seven goals in 24 games speaks for itself. The next young talent is Mikkel Damsgaard, 20, making waves in his first season at Sampdoria. But he isn't truly ready yet.

Given home advantage, Denmark look a good bet to progress from the group, but going deeper could depend on penalties.

Jim Holden

Key...Christian Eriksen in action against Israel

KASPER HJULMAND

What did you learn from your UEFA Nations League campaign?
We learned that what we were thinking of doing with the game actually succeeded in many ways. We learned that we are missing our fans when we play. We learned that we are doing a lot of things well, but that we need a little bit of quality and coolness. But the campaign gave us optimism. In a group with Belgium, England and Iceland we beat Iceland twice and England once. We feel we can compete with the best and on a very good day we can beat them.

How can your team take the next step?
I think it's experience. Belgium, for example, lost in the Nations League three years ago to Switzerland. They learned from that experience. We made some very, very small errors in the match against Belgium. But enough to say: "This is why we lost." The other thing is a little bit more flexibility.

You've played 4-3-3 and 3-4-2-1. Do you want to add another system to that?
No, I would say that it comes out from 4-3-3 or 3-4-3 and then the three up front can be fielded in different ways. Systems are not something that I talk a lot about. It's more about principles and the precision.

Threat...Martin Braithwaite celebrates after scoring against the Republic of Ireland

You have a lot of talent in your squad right now. Where do you rank this generation of Danish players?
We definitely have a very good group of players. The players born in 1994 to 1996 with Andreas Christensen, Yussuf Poulsen and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg – that group was our best Under-17 team. They went to the World Cup with the U17s and then had a very good U21 team. That's the core of the team and they can grow. We then have experienced players like Kasper Schmeichel, Simon Kjaer and Christian Eriksen. And we have talented players coming up in Andreas [Skov] Olsen and [Mikkel] Damsgaard. We haven't reached our top yet, but we can take steps forward.

What is your assessment of Denmark's Euro 2020 group?
I believe we can go through the group but it will be tough. Finland are here for the first time. They are very enthusiastic. They have been working well in the federation for quite some time. I have been following their youth systems and some of their players. They have developed very well.

Russia are always dangerous. At their best they play some really good football. And then we have Belgium, of course, who I think are one of the big favourites. So, it's tough, but we are confident. We have quality and we think we can go through the first round. Then we'll see what happens from there.

What do you think Denmark's ambitions should be at the tournament?
We should dream of winning. We won in 1992 and I hope that my kids can experience those feelings of winning a trophy. It doesn't mean we think we are the favourites. But do we have a chance? Yes! Should we dream? Yes! We are dreaming of some day lifting a trophy again.

Samindra Kunti

Unity...Hjulmand embraces keeper Kasper Schmeichel

TACTICS

Difficult to break down

Head coach Kasper Hjulmand has been pragmatic with his tactics, using a more defensive 4-3-3 system against stronger opponents and a bolder 3-4-1-2 for matches in which Denmark expect to take the initiative. It served him well during the Nations League campaign and seems unlikely to change for the tournament.

It helps that the starting team is very settled, and full-backs Daniel Wass and Joakim Maehle can operate with equal effectiveness as wing-backs. The key to their more adventurous formation is the position of Christian Eriksen, who plays in the hole behind the two strikers. In the 4-3-3 model, he reverts to central midfield alongside Thomas Delaney and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg. The pair provide the foundation along with Simon Kjaer and Andreas Christensen. It is that solidity which makes Denmark formidable.

The problem for Hjulmand is twofold: deciding on the main striker – the one position completely up for grabs – and on the back-up players. It could mean a chance for forward Marcus Ingvartsen, enjoying a breakthrough year at Union Berlin, and for centre-back Joachim Andersen, thriving on loan at Fulham.

Impact...Mikkel Damsgaard is fighting for a starting place

Solid duo...Thomas Delaney (left) and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg (right) are ever-presents in midfield

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 2
v **Germany**
(a, Venue TBC)
Jun 6
v **Bosnia-Herzegovina**
(h, Brondby)

Leader...Simon Kjaer

GROUP GAMES
Jun 12
v **Finland**
(Copenhagen)
Jun 17
v **Belgium**
(Copenhagen)
June 21
v **Russia**
(Copenhagen)

THE VIEW FROM DENMARK

"It is a fantastic bonus for Denmark to have group matches at home. They have players who are blossoming, some fine individuals and a good team ethic. Kasper Hjulmand has made a fine start as head coach in tough circumstances, and that makes me so glad."

Morten Olsen, former Denmark coach

"I think the Danish team is still developing and will peak for the European Championship. When I watch them, I can see good things coming along. It has probably helped them that the tournament was delayed for 12 months."

Per Frimann, ex-international

Pragmatic... Hjulmand

COACH

Kasper HJULMAND
Age 49 (09.04.72)
Appointed August 2020

Kasper Hjulmand has long been regarded as one of the top Danish coaches of his generation, making his reputation by winning the Superliga title with Nordsjaelland in 2012. He replaced Thomas Tuchel as coach of Mainz in 2014, but only lasted eight months.

His Denmark reign started in 2020 when Age Hareide, who had guided the Danes to the Euros, decided not to stay on an extra year for the delayed finals. Hjulmand says the special ingredient working with Denmark is the authentic team spirit and pride of his players.

THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

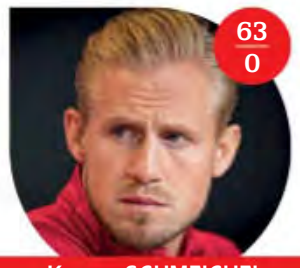
GOALKEEPERS

1 / 0

Jonas LOSSL
Midtjylland
Age 32 (01.02.89)
His heroics saved Huddersfield Town from one relegation, but was a spare part at Everton before returning to the Danish Superliga.

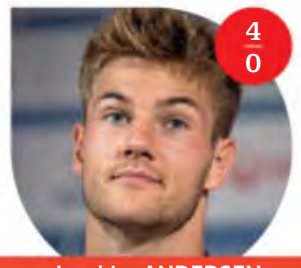
8 / 0

Frederik RONNOW
Schalke (Ger)
Age 28 (04.08.92)
Good shot-stopper, with plenty of practise playing on loan at Schalke this season. Main deputy for vice-captain Schmeichel.


63 / 0

Kasper SCHMEICHEL
Leicester City (Eng)
Age 34 (05.11.86)
Highly experienced Premier League title-winning goalkeeper who is widely admired, not least by his famous father Peter. Undisputed No.1.

DEFENDERS


4 / 0

Joachim ANDERSEN
Fulham (Eng)
Age 24 (31.05.96)
Beach boy from the coast south of Copenhagen. An elegant centre-back enjoying a fine loan spell at Fulham. Likely to edge out "Zanka".

40 / 1

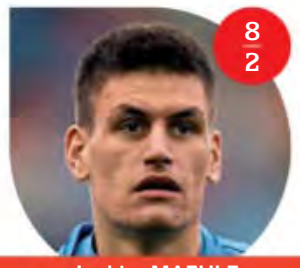
Andreas CHRISTENSEN
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 25 (10.04.96)
Cultured, ball-playing centre-back whose club career has been revised by the arrival of Thomas Tuchel as Chelsea manager.

26 / 1

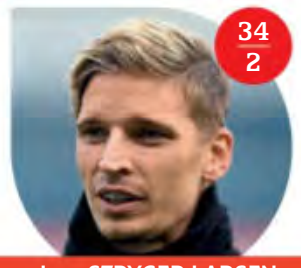
Henrik DALSGAARD
Brentford (Eng)
Age 31 (27.07.89)
Robust and reliable full-back who has been key to the Danish revolution at English second-tier side Brentford. Jostling with Nicolai Boilesen for a squad spot.

105 / 3

Simon KJAER
Milan (Ita)
Age 32 (26.03.89)
Enjoying the best season of a much-travelled career this year at Milan. Intelligent veteran central defender who has matured with age.


8 / 2

Joakim MAEHLE
Atalanta (Ita)
Age 23 (20.05.97)
Dynamic right-back who can also play on the left flank. Joined Atalanta in the winter after winning the Belgian league title with Genk.

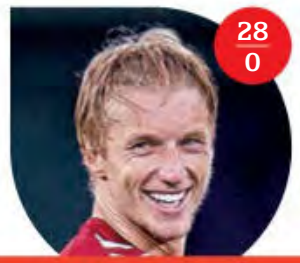

34 / 2

Jens STRYGER LARSEN
Udinese (Ita)
Age 30 (21.02.91)
Hard-running veteran who made his debut in 2016. Suits the wing-back system but is prone to costly errors at his club Udinese. A back-up player only.

21 / 1

Jannik VESTERGAARD
Southampton (Eng)
Age 28 (03.08.92)
Giant central defender who chose Denmark, even though eligible for Germany through his mother. Usual choice when the team plays three at the back.

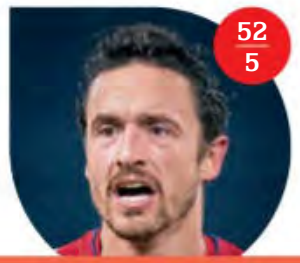
MIDFIELDERS


28 / 0

Daniel WASS
Valencia (Spa)
Age 31 (31.05.89)
The ultimate utility player; right-back, left-back, wing-back, attacking midfielder. Has spent six years playing in La Liga after spells in Portugal and France.

2 / 2

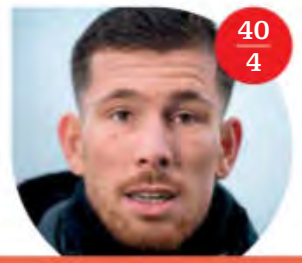
Mikkel DAMSGAARD
Sampdoria (Ita)
Age 20 (03.07.00)
The new great hope of the nation, a skilful attacking midfielder playing his first full season under the watchful eye of club boss Claudio Ranieri.


52 / 5

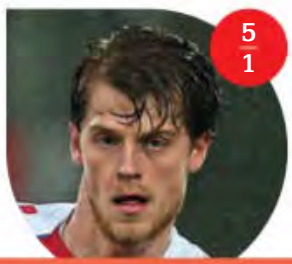
Thomas DELANEY
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Age 29 (03.09.91)
Tigerish yet intelligent midfielder of American ancestry, who is now in his third season at Dortmund. One of the first names on the teamsheet.

106 / 36

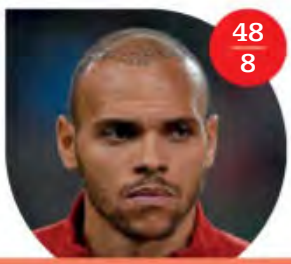
Christian ERIKSEN
Internazionale (Ita)
Age 29 (14.02.92)
Classic, creative ball-playing No.10 with more than a century of international caps, and vast club experience at Tottenham, Ajax and Internazionale.


40 / 4

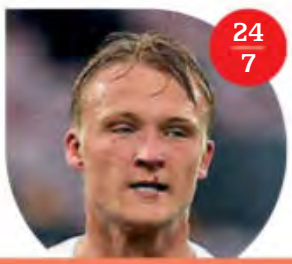
Pierre-Emile HOJBJERG
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 25 (05.08.95)
Made his Bayern Munich debut at 17 under Pep Guardiola, the hard-tackling and tattoo-laden midfielder is now shining at Spurs with Jose Mourinho.


5 / 1

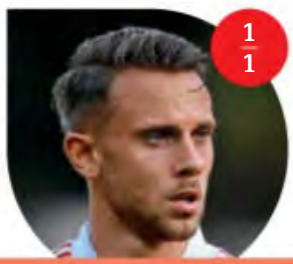
Mathias JENSEN
Brentford (Eng)
Age 25 (01.01.96)
Sharp, swift central midfielder with an eye for a pass; another of the band of Danes making a name at Brentford. Only made his debut in October.


48 / 8

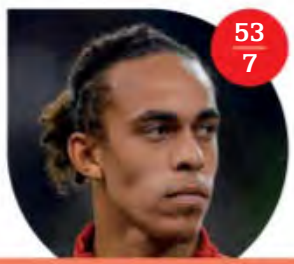
Martin BRAITHWAITE
Barcelona (Spa)
Age 29 (05.06.91)
Lively winger/striker, though an unlikely choice when signed by Barcelona. Has held his own at the Nou Camp. Married to a French TV star.


24 / 7

Kasper DOLBERG
Nice (Fra)
Age 23 (06.10.97)
Prolific scorer as a youngster at Ajax, but plagued by injury and illness at Nice. Has flattered to deceive so far and is under threat of losing his place in the XI.

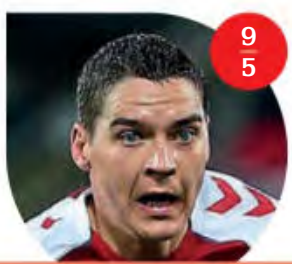

1 / 1

Marcus INGVARTSEN
Union Berlin (Ger)
Age 25 (04.01.96)
Sparkling in a fine season at Union Berlin after winning the Belgian league with Genk in 2018-19. Goalscorer who can also operate on the wing.


53 / 7

Yussuf POULSEN
RB Leipzig (Ger)
Age 26 (15.06.94)
Intelligent and brave forward who has been with RB Leipzig all the way from third tier to the elite, and is their club record appearance holder.

FORWARDS


9 / 5

Robert SKOV
Hoffenheim (Ger)
Age 24 (20.05.96)
Another ultimate utility player; winger, right-back and left wing-back, and record scorer in one season for Copenhagen. Less prolific at Hoffenheim.

5 / 3

Andreas SKOV OLSEN
Bologna (Ita)
Age 21 (29.12.99)
Lively winger who's flourished at Bologna and scored twice in a 4-0 World Cup qualifier win against Austria to seal a swift rise into Denmark's thinking.

6 / 3

Jonas WIND
Copenhagen
Age 22 (07.02.99)
Tall striker who scored in a friendly against Sweden and also netted against Belgium. An ace in the Danish Superliga, but is that enough?

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Oliver CHRISTENSEN (Odense)
DEFENDERS Nicolai BOILESEN (Copenhagen), Mathias "ZANKA" JORGENSEN (Copenhagen), Rasmus NISSEN KRISTENSEN (RB Salzburg, Aut), Alexander SCHOLZ (Midtjylland)
MIDFIELDERS Alexander BAH (Slavia Prague, Cze), Philip BILLING (Bournemouth, Eng), Jens JONSSON (Cadiz, Spa), Jesper LINDSTROM (Brondby), Christian NORGAARD (Brentford, Eng), Lasse SCHONE (Heerenveen, Ned)
FORWARDS Lucas ANDERSEN (Aalborg), Andreas CORNELIUS (Parma, Ita), Christian GYTKJAER (Monza, Ita), Pione SISTO (Midtjylland)

Pressure back on

Unlike 2018, England will be burdened by big pressure and expectation at Euro 2020

In 2008, Fabio Capello bemoaned: "I'm worse off than everyone. In the Premier League, only 35 per cent of the players are English." This came less than a year after he'd taken charge of England. "I go to quite a few games these days and there are no English players," said Roy Hodgson five years later, and his replacement also agreed: "Often you are picking fringe players – that goes without saying when you've only got 31 per cent [of English players in the Premier League]," said Sam Allardyce in 2016.

A lack of English players featuring regularly in top-flight football was a recurring complaint for all three of Gareth Southgate's predecessors. Yet the current England manager has an entirely different problem: how to make room for all the players at his disposal – and who to leave out.

The current talent pool is arguably as deep as it has ever been, and it is no coincidence. In 2017, England won the U17 and U20 World Cups, along with the Euro U19s. Many of the players from those sides have now graduated to the seniors, including Jadon Sancho, Phil Foden, Reece James and Mason Mount. Having managed the U21s for three years, Southgate has put youth at the heart of his England team, and given debuts to no less than 43 players.

Selection headaches...Trent Alexander-Arnold or Reece James?

> If England reach the final they will play all but two games at Wembley, and with so much quality and talent in the squad it is fair to see why the bookmakers have them as favourites

This presents an entirely different problem for Southgate, but one that he has stood up to throughout his time. He was ruthless in leaving out senior figures like Wayne Rooney and Joe Hart when he first took over, and more recently has resisted fan pressure to build the team around Jack Grealish. In March, he also controversially left out Trent Alexander-Arnold for the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, citing the strength in depth of the right-back position and the Liverpool star not quite reaching the high level of previous seasons as the reasons for his omission.

The reaction offered a glimpse of the headaches that the manager will face this summer. England came through the three qualifiers comfortably, but if they fail to perform this summer there will be no shortage of critics pointing out who should have featured – be it Alexander-Arnold, Grealish, or any one of a number of highly-talented players that will have to be left out.

Unlike in 2018, there is real pressure on Southgate and his team this time. If England reach the final they will play all but two games at Wembley, and with so much quality and talent in the squad it is fair to see why the bookmakers have them as favourites. How he and his team deal with the increased pressure will define how they perform in the tournament.

That, however, is a problem that Capello, Hodgson and Allardyce would have loved.

Jamie Evans

GARETH SOUTHGATE

Do you have a rigid system or should we expect to see different approaches?
In terms of formations, we have to be adaptable. We talk about tactical systems, but during the game players have to adapt and adjust. You can write the formation down at the start of the game, but there aren't many moments within the game when the players are actually in those positions. The game is so fluid and players have got to make sure they make good decisions.

Harry Kane has developed his game this season and is playing deeper. Could that be displayed for England this summer?
Harry's always had that capability and the technique to link the play. He's probably as good a forward passer as we've got in our squad. I wouldn't necessarily say it's a part of his game that we weren't aware of. It shows what an outstanding all-round player he is.

What will be your approach to beating the top nations this summer?
We've got to go into big games with a very positive mindset. We know that we can hurt teams. We've got players who can score goals and we know we don't concede many, so we're an improving team that are going to

Kane...captain and goal threat

get better over the next few years. When you look at the age of youngsters like Declan Rice, Mason Mount and the team on the pitch in the autumn – 19-year-olds, 17-year-olds... the future is so exciting. We've got to make sure we're getting results and progressing.

How do you solve the right-back dilemma?
Trent [Alexander-Arnold] is a super talent and will play a big part with England in the future. I don't think he's played at the level that he found in the last couple of years this season. Reece James and Kieran Trippier have had exceptional seasons and Kyle Walker's been in great form with Manchester City. It's a remarkable position of strength.

Jack Grealish has become a buzzword player for supporters over the last year. How difficult is it to avoid that clamour?
If you want to be the manager of any big team then you've got to make decisions that you believe are the right ones for the team. That's part of life at the top. We are blessed with some very good players, but I imagine that when Sven [Goran Eriksson] had to pick from Scholes, Beckham, Gerrard, Lampard and Carrick – that was a pretty difficult choice as well. All big managers have to make those decisions and you've got to be strong and make them for the right reasons.

Fans' favourite... Jack Grealish

Since the World Cup, the players seem fearless. How have you achieved that?
When we took over it was on the back of the Iceland match at the Euros and there wasn't a great deal of enjoyment. The players of today shouldn't be burdened [by the past]. They've seen what getting to major semi-finals [at the World Cup and Nations League] feels like. We've got to have a mindset of challenging, rather than being fearful. I think that's what the players want and that's what we have now.

Matt Read

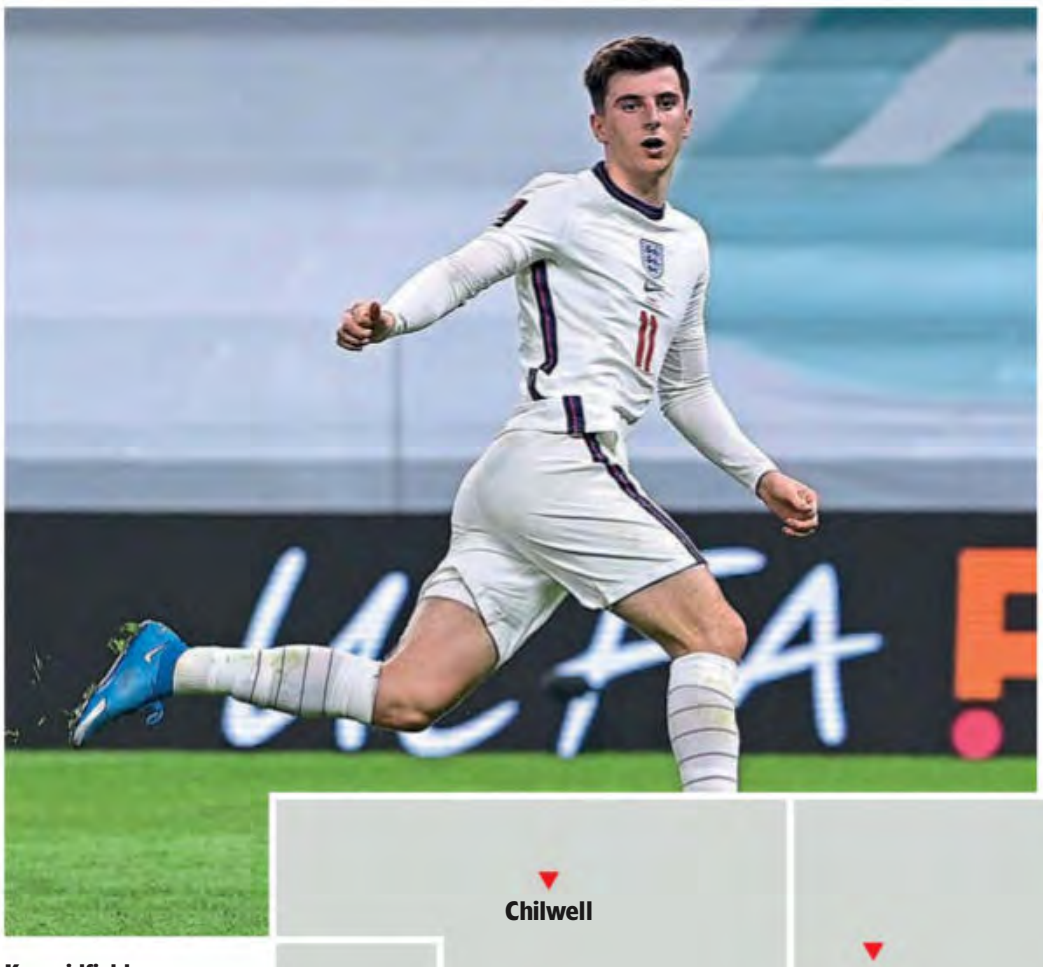
TACTICS

Back three or back four?

Since reaching the 2018 World Cup semi-finals with a 3-5-2 formation, England have alternated between 4-3-3 and 3-4-3. The reason for the switch has been twofold: firstly, while England qualified with ease, their defending gave Southgate cause for concern, notably conceding three goals at home to Kosovo and losing 2-1 in the Czech Republic. As a result, three centre-backs were used for the Nations League – protected by two holding midfielders – in a move that made England more solid in defence, but less fluid in attack.

Secondly, Southgate believes tactical flexibility will be key to England's success, and as a result has sought to accumulate a wider variety of tactical options. The group stage will likely be negotiated with a centre-back pairing, but tougher tests could see a third defender join John Stones and Harry Maguire.

In terms of selection, Southgate has plenty of headaches to mull over. Declan Rice, Mason Mount, Raheem Sterling and Harry Kane can all expect to start against Croatia, but the final two spots in midfield and attack are very much up for grabs, while both full-back/wing-back positions will be hotly contested too.



Key midfielder... Mason Mount

First-choice centre-backs... Harry Maguire and John Stones

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 2 v **Austria** (h, Middlesbrough)
Jun 6 v **Romania** (h, Middlesbrough)

Wembley...England will play all of their group games at home

GROUP GAMES
Jun 13 v **Croatia** (London)
Jun 18 v **Scotland** (London)
Jun 22 v **Czech Republic** (London)

THE VIEW FROM ENGLAND

"The current generation of talent warrants real hope. Southgate has one of the most vibrant and deepest squads at the Euros. A last-16 meeting with France, Germany or Portugal will say a lot, or maybe decide it all. It might even be better that England finish second in the group."

Miguel Delaney, chief football writer, The Independent

"England have a chance if their defensive concentration improves and if Southgate can utilise the wonderful attacking riches he has available to him. He has restored public confidence in the team and helped remove the fear that used to inhibit them."

Henry Winter, chief football writer, The Times

Growing pressure...Euro 2020 will be Southgate's biggest test

COACH

Gareth SOUTHGATE
Age 50 (03.09.70)
Appointed September 2016

Russia. The waistcoat. Atomic Kitten. For a while, Southgate was the most poplar England manager since Euro '96. The goodwill lasted throughout England's inaugural Nations League campaign, where they finished a creditable third.

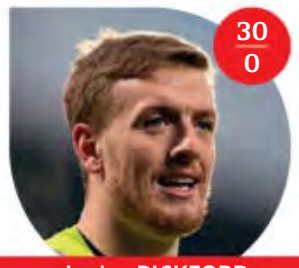
Now though, the honeymoon period is over and the pressure has dialled up. While he remains broadly popular, there are murmurs of criticism over his overly cautious approach during the 2020-21 Nations League and some of his recent squad selections, such is the fickle nature of managing England.

THE SQUAD

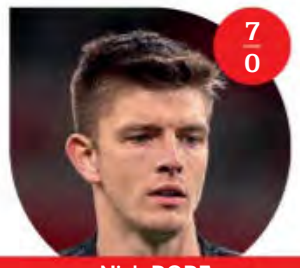
● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

Dean HENDERSON
Manchester United
Age 24 (12.03.97)
A strong finish to the season between the sticks at Manchester United could make him a candidate for the No.1 jersey.

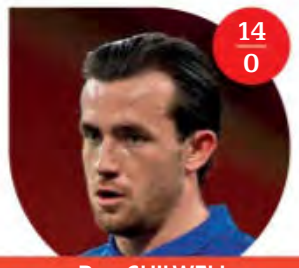


Jordan PICKFORD
Everton
Age 27 (07.03.94)
In spite of some sketchy form, Southgate has remained loyal to the Everton goalkeeper since the World Cup, largely due to his distribution skills.

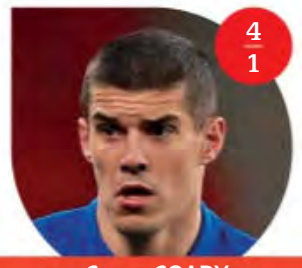


Nick POPE
Burnley
Age 29 (19.04.92)
Arguably the best shot-stopper at Southgate's disposal, Pope's weakness with the ball at his feet were exposed during March's World Cup qualifiers.

DEFENDERS

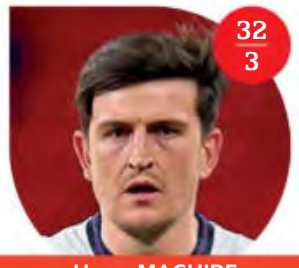


Ben CHILWELL
Chelsea
Age 24 (21.12.96)
Started five of England's eight qualifiers before joining Chelsea for £45m, yet the left-back's place in the side is still not guaranteed.

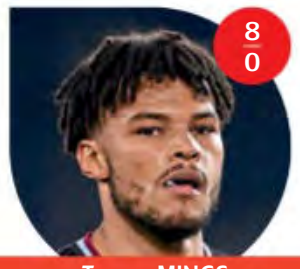


Conor COADY
Wolverhampton Wanderers
Age 28 (25.02.93)
Coady's experience at the heart of Wolves' back three over the last few seasons has made him a valuable option in Southgate's plans.

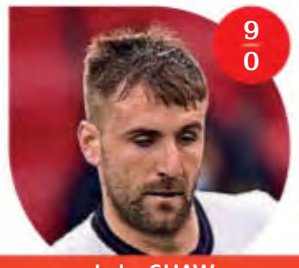
Reece JAMES
Chelsea
Age 21 (08.12.99)
The decision to select him ahead of Trent Alexander-Arnold in March was controversial, yet James has outperformed the Liverpool man for England.



Harry MAGUIRE
Manchester United
Age 28 (05.03.93)
First-choice centre-back ever since the World Cup, where he was one of the defining characters in England's story. Manchester United captain.



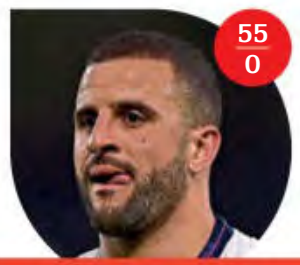
Tyrone MINGS
Aston Villa
Age 28 (13.03.93)
The Aston Villa centre-back's left foot will provide extra balance in the defence, particularly if Southgate opts for a back three.



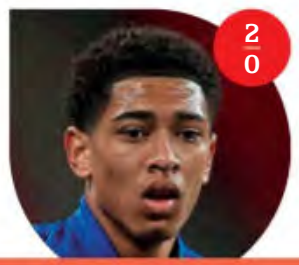
Luke SHAW
Manchester United
Age 25 (12.07.95)
With Shaw producing his best form since breaking his leg in 2015, Southgate's biggest selection headache may well be picking his first-choice left-back.

John STONES
Manchester City
Age 26 (28.05.94)
A player transformed. Having been seemingly discarded at both club and international level, he is now key to the Premier League's meanest defence.

MIDFIELDERS

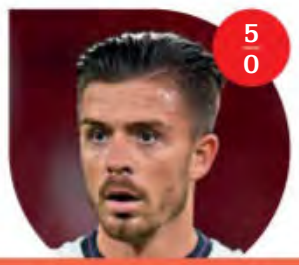


Kyle WALKER
Manchester City
Age 30 (28.05.90)
Largely overlooked during qualifying, Walker returned for the Nations League. Could be deployed on the right of a back three or four.



Jude BELLINGHAM
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Age 17 (29.06.03)
Being left out of the Euro U21s in March suggested that Southgate has big plans for the Dortmund teenager. An undoubted star of the future.

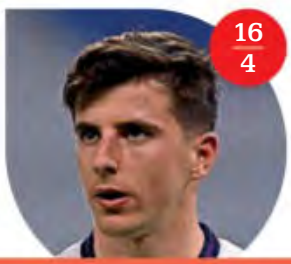
Phil FODEN
Manchester City
Age 20 (28.05.00)
Possibly the biggest beneficiary of the delayed Euros, Foden has demonstrated his huge potential in 2020-21. Can play in midfield or as a wide forward. Huge talent.



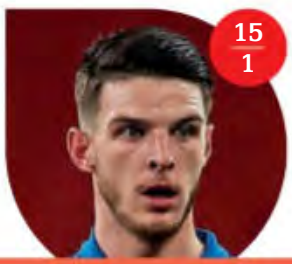
Jack GREALISH
Aston Villa
Age 25 (10.09.95)
Likely to start on the bench, but his importance to the team could increase as the tournament progresses. A creative playmaker with a unique skill set.

Jordan HENDERSON
Liverpool
Age 30 (17.06.90)
As long as he's fit in time, the Liverpool captain's experience will make him a certainty for the squad. If not, Kalvin Phillips is the next cab off the rank.

Jessie LINGARD
West Ham United
Age 28 (15.12.92)
Wasn't on England's radar at the turn of the year, but his incredible run of form on loan at West Ham can't be ignored. Could edge out Arsenal wonderkid Bukayo Saka.



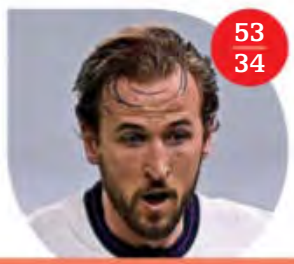
Mason MOUNT
Chelsea
Age 22 (10.01.99)
A clear favourite of managers Southgate, Frank Lampard and now Thomas Tuchel, it has taken some supporters a little longer to realise just how good he is.



Declan RICE
West Ham United
Age 22 (14.01.99)
Indispensible for his club, and approaching a similar status for his country. England's most accomplished and destructive holding-midfielder.

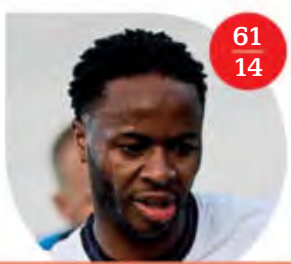
FORWARDS

Dominic CALVERT-LEWIN
Everton
Age 24 (16.03.97)
11 goals in his first 11 league games of the season – plus four more for England – saw Everton's aerial king establish himself as Kane's understudy.

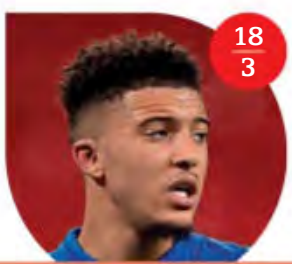


Harry KANE
Tottenham Hotspur
Age 27 (28.07.93)
The World Cup Golden Boot winner needs four more goals to match Gary Lineker's record of ten tournament goals for the Three Lions.

Marcus RASHFORD
Manchester United
Age 23 (31.10.97)
Faces a battle to start having not played for England since October, but undoubtedly one of the most exciting attackers in the squad and someone who Southgate likes.



Raheem STERLING
Manchester City
Age 26 (08.12.94)
Made his debut in 2012, but 12 of his 14 international goals have come since the World Cup, where he failed to score. Yet to score a tournament goal.



Jadon SANCHO
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Age 21 (25.03.00)
Leaving the Premier League glare has undoubtedly aided his development, yet also made him slightly forgotten by some. One of Europe's best dribblers.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Sam JOHNSTONE (West Bromwich Albion)
DEFENDERS Trent ALEXANDER-ARNOLD (Liverpool), Eric DIER (Tottenham Hotspur), Michael KEANE (Everton), Kieran TRIPPIER (Atletico Madrid, Spa)
MIDFIELDERS Harvey BARNES (Leicester City), James MADDISON (Leicester City), Kalvin PHILLIPS (Leeds United), Bukayo SAKA (Arsenal), James WARD-PROWSE (Southampton)
FORWARDS Tammy ABRAHAM (Chelsea), Patrick BAMFORD (Leeds United), Mason GREENWOOD (Manchester United), Danny INGS (Southampton), Ollie WATKINS (Aston Villa)

Winning hearts & minds

But after qualifying for their first-ever major tournament, there is cautious optimism

For the Finland national team and their fans, November 15, 2019 will always be a special day. They had never qualified for a major tournament before, and while Finnish football fans had followed their team with a ferocious passion, the country as a whole was more drawn to winter sports. The men's national team, the "*Huuhkajat*" (Eagle-Owls), were often cast in a particularly unfavourable light by the country's immensely popular, multiple World Championship-winning ice hockey team. In 2016 the football team went a full calendar year without winning a single game, and in 2017 they dropped to 110th in the FIFA rankings.

The appointment of Markku Kanerva as coach in late 2016 was a turning point, even if it took some time for results to catch on. A strong showing in the first edition of the Nations League saw Finland top their group, ahead of Hungary, Greece and Estonia. A successful qualifying campaign for Euro 2020 followed, and on the fateful date in November 2019, they just had to beat Liechtenstein to secure qualification for their first-ever major tournament. Of course, fans who had been following Finland for any length of time knew that for Finland there was no such thing as "just beating" anyone. Since 2010 there had been ignominious defeats to the likes of Estonia, Lithuania and Moldova.

Pitch invasion... captain Tim Sparv celebrates with supporters

> Just being at a major tournament is a long-awaited triumph, but their team is rugged, has a strong spirit and some real bite up front

But things had changed. Under Kanerva's leadership the team were harder to beat, and the emergence of Teemu Pukki up front had given them a reliable goal threat. In his playing days Kanerva was a defender for HJK Helsinki and Swedish side Elfsborg, but he also worked as a school teacher. As national team coach he brought with him methods from the classroom, creating a positive learning environment where players have clear instructions, but their voices are heard and they are also involved in the decision making. The positive results as well as the selfless, hard-working nature of the team has resonated deeply with the country's population, and when they faced Liechtenstein on that famous night in 2019 the country stood still. Crowds gathered to watch the game in public screenings, and when the team won 3-0 it sparked euphoric celebrations.

Watching Finns running wild in the streets on that cold November night, anyone who was unaware of the football team's progress might be forgiven for thinking that the ice hockey team must have won something again. They hadn't, rather it was the *Huuhkajat* who had at long last rewarded their long-suffering fans. For Finland, just being at a major tournament is a long-awaited triumph, but their team is rugged, has a strong spirit and some real bite up front. There is cautious optimism in Finland that the team could surprise some of their more illustrious opponents this summer.

Lars Sivertsen

MARKKU KANERVA

What does qualification for Euro 2020 mean to the country and Finnish football? First of all, it means that the dream of a generation finally came true. Qualifying for a major tournament has been the team's aim for decades. I never thought I'd be part of it, and I am very proud that we were able to accomplish our dream, despite the fact that several experienced key players retired in 2017. We actually made the Finns excited and proud about football. That has meant a lot. Now, we have quite a huge football boom and everybody is waiting for the Euros.

Your keeper, Lukas Hradecky, is the only Finn playing regularly in one of Europe's top five leagues. Is it a concern that not enough Finns play at the highest level? Of course, I wish I had more players playing in the top five leagues. Unfortunately, the situation isn't like that and I have to accept that. But hopefully in the future – and especially if we are successful at the Euros and in the World Cup qualifiers – it will increase the interest in our players and help them to take the next steps with their clubs. If I think about the experience the players get by playing in the top leagues, that would help them to adapt to playing the kind of tough games we are facing.

Heroes...Finnish players celebrate during their successful qualifying campaign

Teemu Pukki has scored many goals for Finland. What are his main qualities, aside from finding the net?
We often talk about strikers and the number of goals they score. Of course, that's their main job, but in our team and for Norwich his role is much more. He is very active in defending. He is a quick player. He can time his runs in behind the back four very well and he is a good goalscorer. Mentally, he is strong. If he doesn't score, it doesn't bother him that much. I wish I had more similar kind of strikers. Joel Pohjanpalo, playing for Union Berlin, has been injured, and Fredrik Jensen at Augsburg is also struggling with injuries. Hopefully, those guys get more success at their clubs so that we are not only building our attacking game around Teemu.

What is your assessment of your group with Belgium, Denmark and Russia?
It's a tough group. Belgium are No.1 in the FIFA rankings and favourites to win the group. Denmark have quality players as well. Then, there is Russia, who have the benefit of playing us in St. Petersburg. They are very strong as a team because most of the players play in the Russian league so they know each other. So, all three of our opponents have to beat Finland. They can't lose any points to us. In a way, we are underdogs. That role suits us very well.

What will Finland's ambitions be?
Let's take one game at a time. Within a game we have goals. We don't only focus on the results. Of course, there are points to be counted and we want to win games, but mentally it is important for the players to see the smaller picture as well by focusing on what they do in certain situations on the field. Then the results will come.

Samindra Kunti

Bundesliga star... Hradecky competes against the best for Bayer Leverkusen

TACTICS

Pukki leads the line

When starting out in the job, coach Markku Kanerva kept things simple. He favoured a 4-4-2 and gave players very clear and simple tasks. As the group has grown more familiar with each other and more coherent over the years, more complex elements have been added to their tactics. This includes an increased effort to win the ball slightly higher up the pitch. Recently, Kanerva has switched to a back five in certain games, particularly against stronger opponents. Given the strength of Finland's group stage opponents, it seems likely that we will see Finland deploy a back five in the tournament.

Hallmarks of Kanerva's Finland are a robust, cohesive team with intelligent midfield play from the likes of captain Tim Sparv and Glen Kamara, and the constant goal threat from Teemu Pukki. Pukki finds space more easily when playing with a strike partner (Robin Lod, Fredrik Jensen or Joel Pohjanpalo) so Finland tend to favour playing with two up front either in a 4-4-2 or 5-3-2 system. A younger player to look out for is 21-year-old attacking midfielder Onni Valakari, who scored a brilliant goal against France and could add attacking impetus.

Star man...Teemu Pukki scores v Wales in Cardiff

Influential...Rangers midfielder Kamara

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
May 29
v **Sweden**
(a, Solna)
Jun 4
v **Estonia**
(h, Helsinki)

Parken Stadium...their Euros begins v fellow Scandinavians Denmark

GROUP GAMES
Jun 12
v **Denmark**
(Copenhagen)
Jun 16
v **Russia**
(St. Petersburg)
Jun 21
v **Belgium**
(St. Petersburg)

THE VIEW FROM FINLAND

"You will see a team that defends really well, but also the brilliant Teemu Pukki. He is in the best form of his career. That's why, even with tough opponents in Russia, Denmark and Belgium, we can be dark horses. We have a chance to go through from the group."

Hannu Tihinen, Finland FA sports director and former defender

"We are still a young footballing culture compared to other countries and we've not had success before, so in an historical sense expectations are low. But on the other hand this team has surprised us before. It has had good results against better teams under Markku Kanerva."

Ari Virtanen, Helsingin Sanomat

History-maker... Kanerva will lead Finland in their first major tournament

COACH

Markku KANERVA
Age 56 (24.05.64)
Appointed December 2016

Nicknamed "Rive", as a player Kanerva was a defender spending most of his career with HJK Helsinki and played 59 times for Finland. Described as "very theoretical" and "a calm presence" by team captain Tim Sparv, his unassuming manner and quiet leadership has made him a hugely popular figure both within the team and in Finland in general.

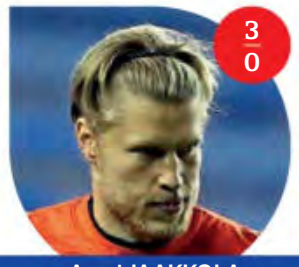
Was in charge of the Under-21 team that qualified for the Euros in 2009, a team which included players like Sparv and Pukki who would go on to become key players for the senior team.

THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

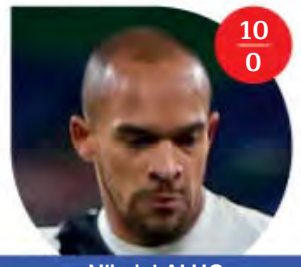
Lukas HRADECKY
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Age 31 (24.11.89)
Excellent shot-stopper whose finely honed reflexes will no doubt play a huge part in any success Finland may have at the tournament.



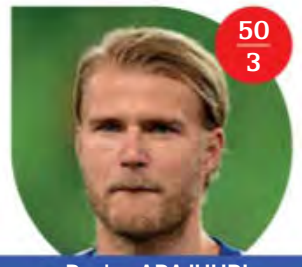
Anssi JAAKKOLA
Bristol Rovers (Eng)
Age 34 (13.03.87)
In the squad when Kanerva took Finland's Under-21 team to the Euros in 2009, playing twice in the group games. Could be picked as third-choice keeper.

Jesse JORONEN
Brescia (Ita)
Age 28 (21.03.93)
Former Fulham academy prospect and fine goalkeeper who is unfortunate to be stuck behind the excellent Hradecky in the pecking order.

DEFENDERS



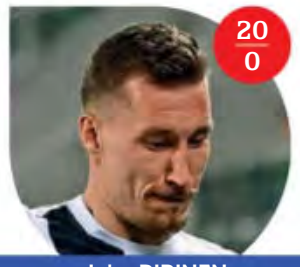
Nikolai ALHO
MTK Budapest (Hun)
Age 28 (12.03.93)
Can play in any role on the right flank. Released a rap single in 2013, and had two spells with HJK Helsinki before moving abroad this winter.



Paulus ARAJUURI
Pafos (Cyp)
Age 32 (15.06.88)
Tall and combative central defender who, at 6ft 4in, is an important aerial presence in the team – both when defending and attacking at set-pieces.

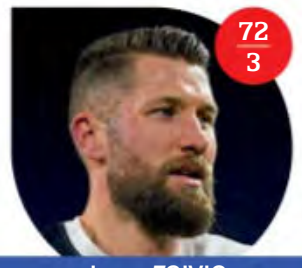
Juhani OJALA
Vejle (Den)
Age 31 (10.06.89)
Another tall central defender who is comfortable on the ball. Not involved in the qualifying campaign but started in the 2-0 friendly win v France last year.

Daniel O'SHAUGHNESSY
HJK Helsinki
Age 26 (14.09.94)
Central defender who can also play left-back. Born in Finland to an Irish father and Finnish mother, and so holds dual Finnish-Irish citizenship.



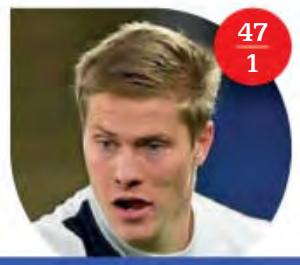
Juha PIRINEN
Trencin (Svk)
Age 29 (22.10.91)
Left-back or left wing-back who likes to get forward. A willing runner who played for a number of clubs in the Veikkausliiga before trying his luck abroad.

Jukka RAITALA
Minnesota United (USA)
Age 32 (15.09.88)
Versatile and well-travelled defender who has ended up in MLS after previously playing in six different countries. A veteran of Kanerva's U21 Euros squad.



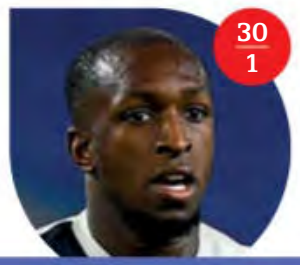
Joona TOIVIO
Hacken (Swe)
Age 33 (04.04.88)
A solid central defender with good composure on the ball and a decent range of passing. A clean striker of the ball who can be a threat from free-kicks.

MIDFIELDERS

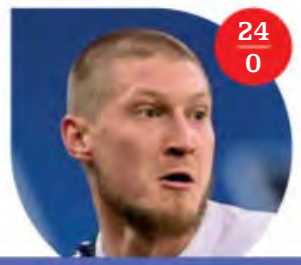


Jere URONEN
Genk (Blg)
Age 26 (13.07.94)
Attack-minded left-back with over 150 games for Belgian club Genk, including appearances in both the Champions League and Europa League group stages.

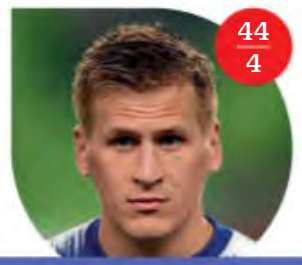
Fredrik JENSEN
Augsburg (Ger)
Age 23 (09.09.97)
Attacking midfielder who works hard off the ball and has an impressive international scoring record. Often used as a second striker next to Pukki.



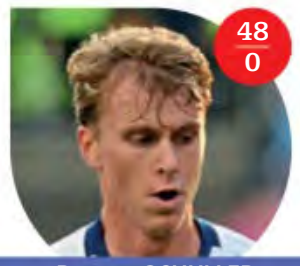
Glen KAMARA
Rangers (Sco)
Age 25 (28.10.95)
Reliable defensive midfielder, who combines high energy and work-rate off the ball with excellent technique and calmness on it.



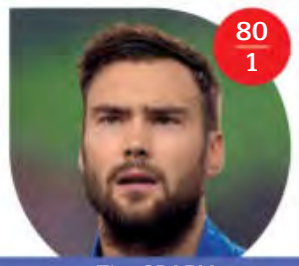
Joni KAUKO
Esbjerg (Den)
Age 30 (12.07.90)
Tough, combative and hard-working central midfielder who provides additional physicality to the midfield. Former captain of the Under-21 side.



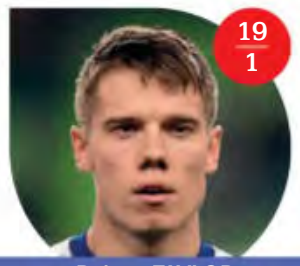
Robin LOD
Minnesota United (USA)
Age 27 (17.04.93)
Versatile midfielder who plays primarily on the left wing but has also played centrally, on the right and as a support striker alongside Pukki.



Rasmus SCHULLER
Djurgarden (Swe)
Age 29 (18.06.91)
Tidy central midfielder of German ancestry who is back in Scandinavian football at Swedish club Djurgarden after a spell in MLS with Minnesota United.



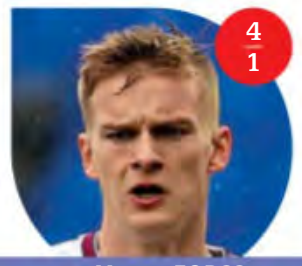
Tim SPARV
AEL (Gre)
Age 34 (20.02.87)
Captain and an intelligent midfielder. Spent three years in Southampton's academy before winning three Danish Superliga titles with Midtjylland.



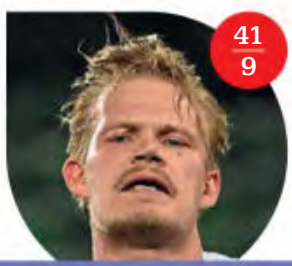
Robert TAYLOR
Brann (Nor)
Age 26 (21.10.94)
Born in Finland to an English father and a Finnish mother, Taylor is a versatile player who can play on either flank or as an attacking midfielder.

FORWARDS

Onni VALAKARI
Pafos (Cyp)
Age 21 (18.08.99)
An enterprising attacking midfielder with an excellent left foot and an eye for goal. Very inexperienced, but scored a brilliant goal against France.



Marcus FORSS
Brentford (Eng)
Age 21 (18.06.99)
Promising young striker who caught the eye when on loan with AFC Wimbledon last season, scoring 11 goals in 18 games in League One.



Joel POHJANPALO
Union Berlin (Ger)
Age 26 (13.09.94)
Former youth prodigy who has never quite fulfilled his potential, at least partially due to injury problems. On loan in Berlin from Bayer Leverkusen.

Teemu PUKKI
Norwich City (Eng)
Age 31 (29.03.90)
By some distance the team's biggest star. Pukki was in quite extraordinary goalscoring form during the qualifiers, scoring ten goals in ten games.

Pyry SOIRI
Esbjerg (Den)
Age 26 (22.09.94)
Quick winger who can play on either side of the pitch. Not a regular but started in the deciding qualifier against Liechtenstein in 2019.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Niki Maenpaa (Venezia, Ita)
DEFENDERS Albin GRANLUND (Stal Mielec, Pol), Niko HAMALAINEN (Queens Park Rangers, Eng), Thomas LAM (PEC Zwolle, Ned), Leo VAISANEN (Elfsborg, Swe), Sauli VAISANEN (Chievo, Ita)
MIDFIELDERS Petteri FORSELL (Stal Mielec, Pol), Lassi LAPPALAINEN (CF Montreal, Can), Ilmari NISKANEN (Ingolstadt, Ger), Simon SKRABB (Brescia, Ita)
FORWARDS Rasmus KARJALAINEN (Orebro, Swe), Jasse TUOMINEN (Hacken, Swe)

World champions' quest

Les Bleus are among the favourites for further glory

World champions France go into Euro 2020 as joint-favourites to win the competition alongside England. Considering the individual talent in the ranks and their recent impressive record in major tournaments, it's not hard to see why. ***Les Bleus*** head coach Didier Deschamps' somewhat stubborn style of management is not everyone's cup of tea, but no one can argue with his results. The disciplined squad he's put together has shown its worth in important matches, and Deschamps' team has built an impressive defensive record during his time in charge.

The 52-year-old's desire to create a true group, rather than a collection of individuals, has seen him ousting certain players and creating a strong team spirit that had been sorely missed before his arrival in 2012. Deschamps has most notably dealt with Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema's on-going issues by ejecting him from the national set-up. He has, however, surprised everyone by backtracking over Juventus midfielder Adrien Rabiot.

After Rabiot refused to be placed on the list of standby players for the 2018 World Cup, Deschamps stated that the player's international career would be over. But, in August 2020, Rabiot was suddenly included in the squad after two years in exile. Deschamps had been looking for a replacement for midfielder Blaise Matuidi, who'd jetted off to Miami to end his career in MLS, and couldn't get Rabiot out of his mind. The coach showed surprising flexibility in bringing the midfielder back into the fold and the player's blend of skill and power now means he's one of the first names on the French teamsheet.

This time around, Deschamps' men will be after revenge for Euro 2016, when they were surprisingly beaten by Portugal in the final in Paris. Eder's extra-time goal gave Portugal a 1-0 win that sent shockwaves around France. Many of the country's players later said this painful defeat was a big motivating factor behind France's World Cup win in Russia two years later. With the squad for this tournament set to be somewhat similar to the one that won in 2018, you'd expect that winning mentality would still be embedded.

Control...Olivier Giroud brings the ball down

France's qualification campaign for the Euros was plain sailing. The team finished first in Group H with eight victories, one draw and just a single defeat away to Turkey. They topped the group with 25 points from ten games and with just six goals conceded.

France have been drawn in Group F for Euro 2020, by far the toughest in the competition. They line up alongside reigning European champions Portugal, Germany and play-off winners Hungary. The team's first game against Germany will be a massive test and will offer an important indicator as to whether or not Deschamps' men are ready to live up to the mantle of tournament joint-favourites.

Howard Johnson

> France's qualification campaign for the Euros was plain sailing

DIDIER DESCHAMPS

Have you already got a good idea of your 23-man squad for the Euros?
I already know roughly 20 of the players going to Euro 2020. If there aren't any injuries or real drop-offs in form, then the majority of my squad is selected.

You've been drawn in the good old "group of death" alongside Germany, Portugal and Hungary. What do you make of that?
We definitely could have had a nicer draw rather than being with two big nations in Portugal and Germany, and in the toughest group of the six. We know these teams' qualities and we've played against them a lot recently. But, then again, it's no easier for them. They won't be delighted at the prospect of facing us either, so we'll have to be ready from the start, because every point counts in the group stage.

Many people consider France the tournament favourites. Do you agree?
These Euros are really important for us, and because we became world champions and have the results we had last year, then we have to accept that we're considered favourites. But we're not thinking about who the favourites are or not. We just

Goal...France celebrate a rare Benjamin Pavard goal against Sweden

need to take every game as it comes and try our best to win.

How do you feel about potentially playing in empty stadiums?
The silence that you get in these empty stadiums is horrible. The essence of sport and football is emotion, and sharing that feeling with the fans. There was a short period where we had a few fans in and it was better than nothing, but it was still really tough. There is one single advantage in the situation – even though I'd happily give that advantage up – and that's the fact that at least all my players can hear me when I'm on the touchline!

And what impact do you think the strange situation will have on the performance of your players?
The players find themselves playing with no crowds every three days. In sport, what enables you to go above and beyond is the adrenaline. But it's so hard to maintain that adrenaline when you're playing behind closed doors. I feel for the players, but it's better than nothing at all.

How do you rate France's chances of lifting the trophy this summer?
We're not scared of anyone. I think some countries are probably scared of us, because we're one of the best nations in the tournament. But the most important part is to respect every opponent, because you can never take anything for granted in these big games. So we're confident, but there are other dangerous teams. Portugal are a really great side and Germany are transitioning well. Whenever we go into a tournament I always tell my players that we want to go all the way, so that's our goal.

Howard Johnson

Respect...coach Didier Deschamps fist bumps midfielder Paul Pogba

TACTICS

Tried and tested

Didier Deschamps hasn't been one to chop and change his tactics very much during his impressive nine years at the helm. He's currently favouring a back four and a hard-working double pivot in central midfield, with those spots filled by N'Golo Kante and Paul Pogba. On the left he opts for an "out-of-position" central midfielder, with Adrien Rabiot performing that role since Blaise Matuidi's departure. Rabiot offers more technical ability, but still has the dependability to give Kylian Mbappe freedom down the right wing to combine with No.10 Antoine Griezmann and striker Olivier Giroud to create his side opportunities.

The French squad is packed with ability and cover in most positions – the only areas where the French may be lacking could be at right-back and up front. Bayern Munich's Benjamin Pavard is set to remain the number one right-back after Lyon's Leo Dubois failed to impress.

In the striking department, no one has taken the opportunity to oust Giroud. Anthony Martial has shown glimpses, but his finishing leaves a lot to be desired, while Wissam Ben Yedder doesn't seem able to reproduce his club form for France, meaning Giroud should get the nod.

Injured...Anthony Martial is in a race to be fit for the Euros

Freedom...Kylian Mbappe will have the license to roam

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 2
v **Wales**
(h, Nice)
Jun 8
v **Team TBC**
(h, Saint-Denis)

Revenge...France's final group game will be a repeat of the 2016 final

GROUP GAMES
Jun 15
v **Germany**
(Munich)
Jun 19
v **Hungary**
(Budapest)
Jun 23
v **Portugal**
(Budapest)

THE VIEW FROM FRANCE

"Having staged Euro 2016, France was ineligible to host a match in Euro 2020. Compared to a nation like Germany, that might be a real disadvantage. The draw hasn't been kind to France, either, but I still think they are clear favourites, because they're a tournament team with an incredibly strong mentality."

Nabil Djellit, L'Equipe

"To me, France are favourites. They're world champions, and recent games have shown that even if they struggle the results are still good. They know how they should play and there's a good system in place. With their individual talent, I don't see anyone else who could match them."

Jerome Rothen, RMC Sport

Winner... Deschamps

COACH

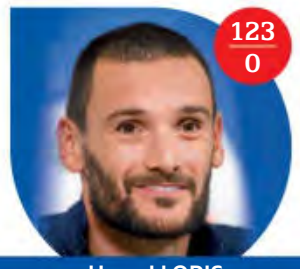
Didier DESCHAMPS
Age 52 (15.10.68)
Appointed July 2012

Deschamps is a serial winner, both as a coach and a player, having captained *Les Bleus* to World Cup glory in 1998 and Euro success in 2000, before leading his team to World Cup victory as a manager in 2018. Deschamps took over back in 2012 and was knocked out in the quarter-finals of his first major tournament at the 2014 World Cup. But since then he's taken his team to the Euro 2016 final and a 2018 World Cup win in his last two major tournaments. It would be a brave man who'd back against Deschamps for more glory.

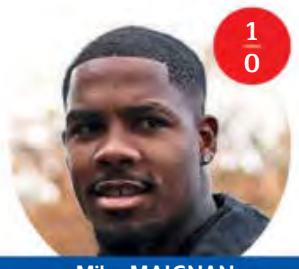
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS


123 / 0

Hugo LLORIS
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 34 (26.12.86)
Heavily criticised at club level this season, the Tottenham goalkeeper remains the undisputed French No.1 and skipper for the Euros.

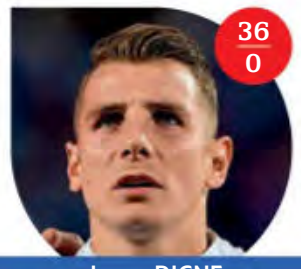

1 / 0

Mike MAIGNAN
Lille
Age 25 (03.07.95)
Only made his debut in October 2020, but the ex-PSG keeper has really found his form at Lille and looks like a possible long-term successor to Lloris.

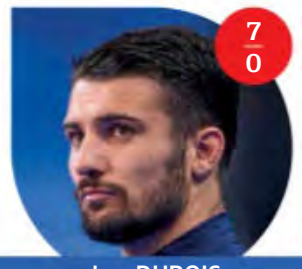
34 / 0

Steve MANDANDA
Marseille
Age 36 (28.03.85)
Marseille's first-choice keeper brings vital experience to the squad at the age of 36, and has done enough to make the 23-man party this summer.

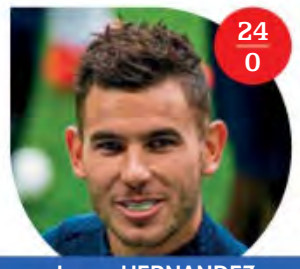
DEFENDERS


36 / 0

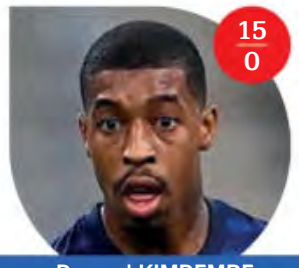
Lucas DIGNE
Everton (Eng)
Age 27 (20.07.93)
Digne has rediscovered his best form at Everton and is battling with Ferland Mendy for the final left-back spot this summer.


7 / 0

Leo DUBOIS
Lyon
Age 26 (14.09.94)
There aren't too many right-backs pushing for a squad place, so Dubois looks set to be on the plane as back-up to Benjamin Pavard.


24 / 0

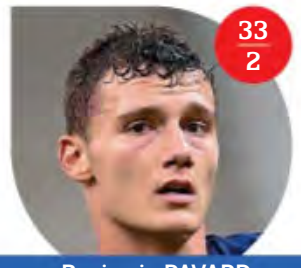
Lucas HERNANDEZ
Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 25 (14.02.96)
A star of the 2018 World Cup team at left-back, Hernandez offers quality and versatility that could see him operate either on the left or centre of defence.


15 / 0

Presnel KIMPEMBE
Paris Saint-Germain
Age 25 (13.08.95)
Sometimes branded as error prone, Kimpembe has grown into a real leader and will most likely start at centre-back alongside Varane.

12 / 1

Clement LENGLET
Barcelona (Spa)
Age 25 (17.06.95)
The Barcelona man is a regular member of Deschamps' squads, but after a tough season it's unlikely he'll be a go-to player at this summer's Euros.


33 / 2

Benjamin PAVARD
Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 25 (28.03.96)
Another star of the 2018 World Cup-winning campaign, Pavard is now an established member of the Bayern Munich team and will surely be a starter for France.

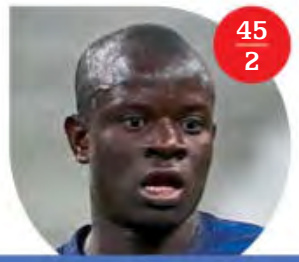
73 / 5

Raphael VARANE
Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 27 (25.04.93)
Has been struggling for form at club level this season, but has always been reliable for France and will be a big part of their Euro campaign.

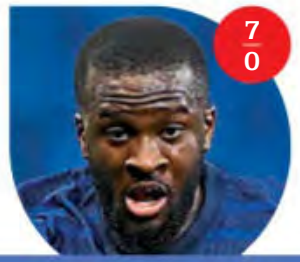
MIDFIELDERS

8 / 1

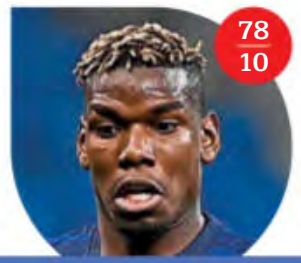
Kurt ZOUMA
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 26 (27.10.94)
The Chelsea man seems to have forced his way back into the international picture after some impressive performances in the English Premier League.


45 / 2

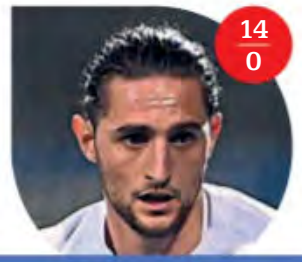
N'Golo KANTE
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 30 (29.03.91)
A man with a massive engine and an important part of Deschamps' French system, it's hard to imagine France's starting XI without him.


7 / 0

Tanguy NDOMBELE
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 24 (28.12.96)
Ndombele's technique makes him a highly useful creative midfielder. This is a tournament where he should be looking to make a name for himself.

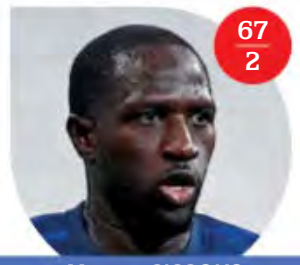

78 / 10

Paul POGBA
Manchester United (Eng)
Age 28 (15.03.93)
A real leader for *Les Bleus*, Pogba will surely be at the heart of France's campaign for glory at Euro 2020. Has an incredible winning record alongside Kante.

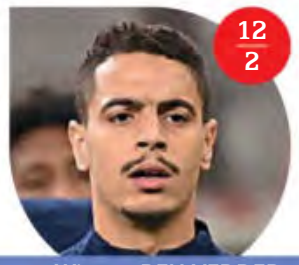

14 / 0

Adrien RABIOT
Juventus (Ita)
Age 26 (03.04.95)
After numerous difficulties at the start of his international career, Rabiot has regained Deschamps' confidence and can expect to play a big part this summer.

FORWARDS


67 / 2

Moussa SISSOKO
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 31 (16.08.89)
A favourite of Deschamps because of his hard work and versatility, Sissoko is a great option in midfield, but may offer most value off the bench.


12 / 2

Wissam BEN YEDDER
Monaco
Age 30 (12.08.90)
The Monaco man has been on fire since joining them from Sevilla in 2019, and will certainly give Deschamps a great option off the bench.

29 / 5

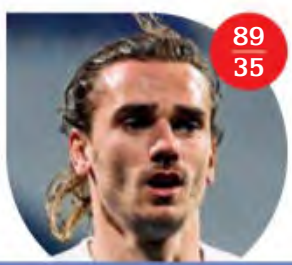
Kingsley COMAN
Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 24 (13.06.96)
With an astonishing nine league titles bagged at the age of just 24, Coman is a natural-born winner. His pace and trickery make him a great option.

23 / 3

Ousmane DEMBELE
Barcelona (Spa)
Age 23 (15.05.97)
Erratic displays and injuries cast doubt over Dembele's inclusion, but he's shown a remarkable upturn in form this season for a rejuvenated Barcelona.

107 / 44

Olivier GIROUD
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 34 (30.09.86)
An ever-present in recent French squads, the Chelsea striker will once more be on the plane, though he may not be starting every game at the age of 34.


89 / 35

Antoine GRIEZMANN
Barcelona (Spa)
Age 30 (21.03.91)
Griezmann has had a tough time since joining Barcelona in 2019, but he's scored ten goals in his last two major international tournaments combined.

27 / 1

Anthony MARTIAL
Manchester United (Eng)
Age 25 (05.12.95)
Martial has become more involved as Deschamps plans to find a new No.9. He sprained his knee in March and is now in a race to return to fitness.

42 / 16

Kylian MBAPPE
Paris Saint-Germain
Age 22 (20.12.98)
The PSG star is back to his best and will be the main man for *Les Bleus* at the Euros. His form will be key as to whether France can lift the trophy or not.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Alphonse AREOLA (Fulham, Eng)
DEFENDERS Ferland MENDY (Real Madrid, Spa), Bouna SARR (Bayern Munich, Ger), Dayot UPAMECANO (RB Leipzig, Ger)
MIDFIELDERS Houssem AOUAR (Lyon), Eduardo CAMAVINGA (Rennes), Thomas LEMAR (Atletico Madrid, Spa) Steven NZONZI (Rennes), Corentin TOLISSO (Bayern Munich, Ger)
FORWARDS Nabil FEKIR (Real Betis, Spa), Jonathan IKONE (Lille), Marcus THURAM (Borussia Monchengladbach, Ger)

The end of an era

Joachim Low's reign approaches its finale

As inevitable as a dollop of mustard on a bratwurst, the recent announcement that *Nationalmannschaft* coach Joachim "Jogi" Low would be stepping down at the end of Euro 2020 was anything but an Earth-shattering development. For a good two years or more, there has been an end-of-days feel to the Low incumbency.

After spending his first decade as *Bundestrainer* (2006-16) in feverish empire-building mode – notably masterminding triumph at the 2014 World Cup, the runners-up spot at the 2008 European Championship and three other international tournament semi-final appearances – Low and company were spectacularly derailed in the group phase of Russia 2018 and have not recovered since. Germany won just three out of eight fixtures in the 2020 calendar year and in a sure sign of a team fumbling in the dark, crashed 6-0 to Spain in a Nations League tie in Seville, the second-heaviest loss in *Nationalmannschaft* history and their worst-ever competitive defeat.

Following that, a 2-1 home defeat to European minnows North Macedonia in their World Cup qualifier in March caused further uproar, with national newspaper *Bild* going with the headline "It is over, Jogi" and dubbing it: "The third historical debacle that Jogi Low... is responsible for".

Shock...Germany losing at home to North Macedonia

Borussia Dortmund's Mats Hummels.

Low axed the three World Cup 2014 winners a couple of years ago after expressing hope that a new generation of talent would step into the breach. Sadly, it has not happened and with Muller, Boateng and Hummels currently in strong form for their clubs, a U-turn would make perfect sense.

Suffice to say, few supporters of the German national team are banking on a fourth European title this summer. In a recent poll in leading sports magazine *Kicker*, only two per cent of respondents predicted a *Nationalmannschaft* triumph. Indeed, almost 90 per cent of those asked retorted that Deutschland will not even go beyond the last eight. Normally Germans would approach a major tournament in a confident, gung-ho fashion. But not this time, it seems.

Nick Bidwell

> Few supporters of the German national team are banking on a fourth European title this summer

Despite a squad that is far from short of quality, particularly in the attacking-third, the fact is that too many fault lines have opened up in the last three seasons. Listing all of the team's shortcomings is a worrying exercise for Germany fans: sloppy defensive play, a lack of on-field communication, a lack of collective co-ordination, not enough leaders on the pitch, negative body language, no tactical Plan B. There are so many issues for Low to address, but a good place to start undoubtedly would be to recall Bayern Munich duo Thomas Muller and Jerome Boateng, as well as

JOACHIM LOW

What was your reaction to the 6-0 Nations League defeat in Spain?
We'd have loved to have played a couple of days later to get it out of our system. After the game, I was terribly frustrated, very disappointed and angry. But then we immediately went into analysis mode, picking out the errors and above all, looking for solutions. We made mistakes, including me. Now we have to correct them. I still have the trust of the players. The Spain game has not altered that. The team can develop strongly from here. I'm convinced of it.

The public's faith in you has quickly slumped. How do you deal with this?
Naturally, it's not very nice. Of course, it affects me. I'm only human and the days following the defeat to Spain were hard. But it's also sparked the motivation in me to bounce back. We know what we're doing, we know how to build something and we want to prove this year that we can be better. This situation has strengthened my ambition. Often the worst setbacks result in new energy.

When you won the World Cup in 2014, you had a team full of leaders. Do you still have this type of character?
More than enough. We have many

Goal...Timo Werner celebrates scoring against Switzerland in the Nations League

individuals with this will-to-win, this winning mentality. I'm thinking of Neuer, Rudiger, Ginter, Kimmich, Kroos, Gundogan. They can bring an extreme hunger to the table. This spirit is as pronounced in the current squad as it was back in 2012 or 2014.

Where do you find the optimism that your team will improve?
A big tournament takes on a life of its own. When you're together for four or five weeks, you have the chance to build on the basics, to solidify the structures. In 2014 in Brazil, we developed and improved during the tournament. In Brazil too, there were hurdles we had to clear. On occasion, you to have to go in for some straight-talking. That's how a team and a coach grow together.

How do you assess your side defensively?
Of late, the defence has been our Achilles heel. But one cannot only point the finger at the defensive unit. The defensive performance of the whole team has to be better. With three or four weeks' work, we will have the answers.

Following your side's early exit from World Cup 2018, you demanded a quicker style of play, quicker end product.

Winners...Low led Germany to World Cup glory in 2014

How do you think that's going?
Our play did speed up a lot in late 2018 and 2019. It was on a par with what we were achieving when winning the 2014 World Cup and 2017 Confederations Cup. Our data backs this up. But in 2020 we became slower. We have many players who provide quality through pace. But if we keep giving the ball away we have no chance in attack. The strength of a team is measured in its quality in possession. We must improve our anticipation and concentration.

Nick Bidwell

TACTICS

Operational changes

Over the last 12 months or so, Low constantly has shuffled the operational pack, alternating between a 3-4-3 – his favourite system – a 4-3-3 and 4-2-3-1. Low has come in for much criticism for his use of three centre-backs and the naysayers do make a valid point. When, as has often been the case, the wing-backs do not push high enough, the set-up effectively becomes a five-man defensive wall – a shape which is light years away from the sort of risk-taking football Low used to encourage. Germany's approach play has become disjointed and sluggish, with key central midfield regulators Toni Kroos and Joshua Kimmich playing a little too deep.

In response to his detractors, Low argues that after years of using a back four as his default formation, everyone had worked Germany out, enjoying success by sitting back and waiting to counter. He wants Germany to be more flexible, adding that the most important factor is attacking at pace. Nonetheless, with recalls for Hummels and Muller looking likely, reverting to a 4-3-3 seems the most practical system.

Key...Ilkay Gundogan is crucial to success

Orchestrator... Toni Kroos is their midfield metronome

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 2
v **Denmark**
(h, Venue TBC)
Jun 7
v **Latvia**
(h, Dusseldorf)

Versatile...Joshua Kimmich could find himself at right-back

GROUP GAMES
Jun 15
v **France**
(Munich)
Jun 19
v **Portugal**
(Munich)
Jun 23
v **Hungary**
(Munich)

THE VIEW FROM GERMANY

"It strikes me that this Germany team lacks the winning mindset, the absolute desire to go all out to achieve a goal. Not that I'm putting the Bayern players in this category. I think Jogi Low has to bring back Thomas Muller. It was a mistake to drop this important player on such dubious grounds."

Olaf Thon, 1990 World Cup winner

"It will be difficult to get back to the top in international football, but I do think we have enough good young players. Kai Havertz, for example, is a brilliant prospect. I'd recall Thomas Muller in a heartbeat. He's playing fantastically for Bayern. But Jerome Boateng's time is over."

Uli Stein, ex-Germany goalkeeper

Experienced... no coach has won more games at the Euros

COACH

Joachim LOW
Age 61 (03.02.60)
Appointed July 2006

Currently the longest-serving coach in international football. The FIFA World Coach of the Year in 2014 is only the third individual to become *Bundestrainer* having never represented the national team as a player. In tournament competition (World Cups and European Championships), no one can match his record of 23 wins from 34 fixtures. As a club coach, his finest hour was early in his career when he helped steer Stuttgart to the 1997 German Cup and the runners-up spot in the 1998 European Cup Winners' Cup.

THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

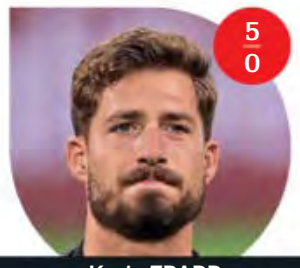
GOALKEEPERS

98 / 0

Manuel NEUER
Bayern Munich
Age 35 (27.03.86)
A decade-and-a-half after making his pro debut, the Gelsenkirchener remains, by some distance, the country's No.1 custodian. Captain.

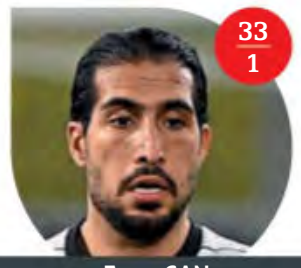
25 / 0

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN
Barcelona (Spa)
Age 29 (30.04.92)
Much, much more than a national team understudy. The only solid, reliable element in a most decidedly unstable Barcelona back-line.

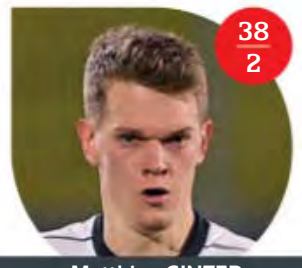

5 / 0

Kevin TRAPP
Eintracht Frankfurt
Age 30 (08.07.90)
Steady, secure last-line-of-defence who is now in his second stint in Frankfurt following three years between the Paris Saint-Germain posts.

DEFENDERS


33 / 1

Emre CAN
Borussia Dortmund
Age 27 (12.01.94)
The versatile ex-Liverpool and Juventus man offers leadership and control. Played left-back in March's World Cup qualifiers.


38 / 2

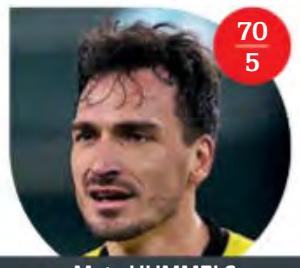
Matthias GINTER
Borussia Monchengladbach
Age 27 (19.01.94)
When it comes to one-on-one duels, the former Freiburg and Dortmund central defender has few peers in the Bundesliga. Much-improved as an organiser.

5 / 0

Robin GOSENS
Atalanta (Ita)
Age 26 (05.07.94)
Attack-conscious left full-back or wing-back. Once an anonymous pro in the Dutch league, he has spectacularly come of age at Atalanta.

8 / 1

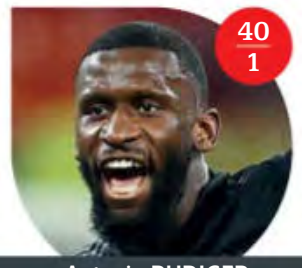
Marcel HALSTENBERG
RB Leipzig
Age 29 (27.09.91)
This enterprising, tough-tackling left-back surely would have made the German squad for the 2018 World Cup if he had not ruptured cruciate ligaments.


70 / 5

Mats HUMMELS
Borussia Dortmund
Age 32 (16.12.88)
Prematurely discarded by Low two years ago, the centre-back remains a class act, both a back-line general and superb on the ball. Likely to get recalled.

12 / 0

Lukas KLOSTERMANN
RB Leipzig
Age 24 (03.06.96)
Adaptable performer who tends to line up for Germany at right-back, while operating as central defender at club level. Comfortable on either flank.


40 / 1

Antonio RUDIGER
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 28 (03.03.93)
The ruthlessly aggressive centre-back has improved out of all recognition since Thomas Tuchel took over at Chelsea in January. A likely starter.

MIDFIELDERS

29 / 1

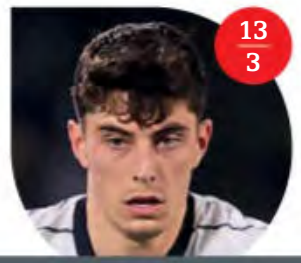
Niklas SULE
Bayern Munich
Age 25 (03.09.95)
Incredible Hulk-like figure with surprising amounts of speed and distribution accuracy. A striker in his early days at Hoffenheim.

32 / 13

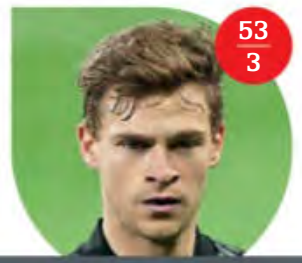
Leon GORETZKA
Bayern Munich
Age 26 (06.02.95)
Outstanding box-to-box man with heaps of goalscoring menace, drive and craft. Bayern's most-improved player this term.

45 / 10

Ilkay GUNDOGAN
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 30 (24.10.90)
In the form of his life for City in 2020-21. Deployed further forward by Pep Guardiola, the silky technician suddenly has discovered a passion for goals.


13 / 3

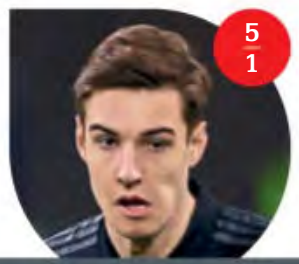
Kai HAVERTZ
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 21 (11.06.99)
German golden boy and brilliant offensive all-rounder, able to grace any position in the attacking-third with his quick feet and sharp mind.


53 / 3

Joshua KIMMICH
Bayern Munich
Age 26 (08.02.95)
Indispensable thanks to his passing and intelligence. The side's emotional totem. Best in midfield but could play right-back with little quality there.

101 / 17

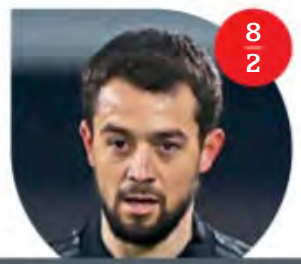
Toni KROOS
Real Madrid (Spa)
Age 31 (04.01.90)
Germany's supreme director of operations since 2010. A playmaker capable of passes from another world. Always tells it like it is.


5 / 1

Florian NEUHAUS
Borussia Monchengladbach
Age 24 (16.03.97)
One of the new faces in the Germany squad. At his best sitting deep, where he can showcase his technique, vision and distribution.

0 / 0

Florian WIRTZ
Bayer Leverkusen
Age 18 (03.05.03)
It speaks volumes that the market valuation of the attacking midfield tyro has increased from €20 million to €45m in 12 months. Uncapped.

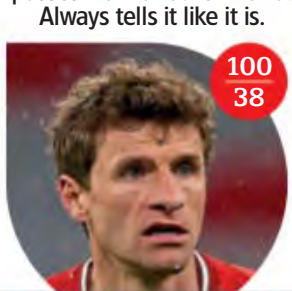

8 / 2

Amin YOUNES
Eintracht Frankfurt
Age 27 (06.08.93)
Brilliant little playmaker enjoying a blistering return to form this season. Velvety skills and attracts the ball like a magnet.

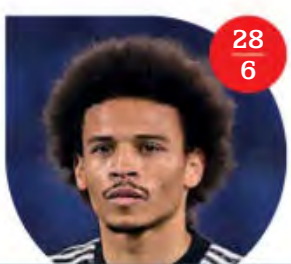
FORWARDS

20 / 15

Serge GNABRY
Bayern Munich
Age 25 (14.07.95)
Multi-dimensional attacker whose pace, strength and single-mindedness make him unplayable. Fantastic goal record for Germany.


100 / 38

Thomas MULLER
Bayern Munich
Age 31 (13.09.89)
Low was wrong to deem the freewheeling attacking-third maestro a busted flush in 2019. Playing better than ever for Bayern and deserves a recall.


28 / 6

Leroy SANE
Bayern Munich
Age 25 (11.01.96)
The former Schalke and Manchester City winger can infuriate with his moodiness, but what an explosive force he is when dribbling at pace.

38 / 15

Timo WERNER
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 25 (06.03.96)
His sprinter-like speed, the deep threat he represents, exactly fits the Joachim Low philosophy. More valuable working through the middle than wide on the left.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Bernd LENO (Arsenal, Eng)
DEFENDERS Ridle BAKU (Wolfsburg), Jerome BOATENG (Bayern Munich), Benjamin HENRICHS (RB Leipzig), Thilo KEHRER (Paris Saint-Germain, Fra), Robin KOCH (Leeds United, Eng), Philipp MAX (PSV, Ned), Jonathan TAH (Bayer Leverkusen)
MIDFIELDERS Nadiem AMIRI (Bayer Leverkusen), Julian BRANDT (B. Dortmund), Mahmoud DAHOUD (B. Dortmund), Julian DRAXLER (Paris Saint-Germain, Fra), Jonas HOFMANN (B. Monchengladbach), Jamal MUSIALA (Bayern Munich)
FORWARDS Marco REUS (B. Dortmund), Luca WALDSCHMIDT (Benfica, Por)

David vs Goliath(s)

Underdogs prepare for a nightmare group

Hungary are on the up. A spectacular goal right on cue by wonderkid Dominik Szoboszlai sent the Magyars through to the Euros in the very stadium built to co-host the finals, Budapest's Puskas Arena. Szoboszlai duly earned himself a move to 2020-21 Bundesliga title challengers, RB Leipzig, joining long-established Hungarian team-mates, goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi and centre-back Willi Orban.

Drawn in the "group of death" with holders Portugal, world champions France and joint-record Euros winners Germany, Hungary are hoping that home advantage for two games might swing the imbalance. Under popular Italian coach, Marco Rossi, Hungary beat Wales and Croatia in their qualifying group only to finish fourth. Then, over ten weeks between September and November, from a decisive Szoboszlai free-kick in Turkey to Kevin Varga's stoppage-time goal against the same opposition, they won five games in eight, losing only once. This run extended to two victories and a draw in March 2021. Rossi's men now have momentum going into this summer, and a nation dreaming of upsets.

Star player and national poster boy Szoboszlai was out with injury after his record Hungarian transfer in December 2020, but key team-mates have found form. Adam Nagy, the discovery of Euro 2016, forever distributing incisive passes, has overcome disillusion at Bologna to get stuck in at Bristol City. Both Zsolt Kalmar (before his Euro 2020-wrecking knee ligament injury) and, another Euro 2016 find, Laszlo Kleinheisler, have been leading silverware-chasing midfields in Slovakia and Croatia respectively.

> Hungary are hoping that home advantage for two games might swing the imbalance

Hungarian champions Ferencvaros, due to provide several squad members, overcame Celtic to face Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo in the Champions League, invaluable experience for their defender Endre Botka, midfielder David Siger and goalkeeper Denes Dibusz. Centre-back Attila Szalai soon settled in at Fenerbahce even when deployed on the left. His namesake Adam, whose opening goal against Austria and his subsequent crowd dive ignited Hungary's Euros adventure in 2016, will want more of the same before departing the international stage.

Captain...Adam Szalai protects possession

Lynchpins from five years ago, goalkeeper Gabor Kiraly, centre-back Roland Juhasz and free-kick specialist Zoltan Gera, now have replacements in Gulacsi, Attila Szalai and Szoboszlai.

Although they topped their group in 2016, Hungary still start as underdogs in such illustrious company. Whether the Puskas Arena, unveiled in 2019 to replace the historic Nepstadion, will be bouncing or silent for those two group games, the team will still be buoyed by real expectation at home, a unique experience for players and public alike. Everyone now needs to rise to the occasion – as Szoboszlai demonstrated so dramatically back in November.

Peterjon Cresswell

MARCO ROSSI

What are your reflections on the dramatic play-off victory against Iceland that saw Hungary qualify for Euro 2020?
It was quite a particular match. We went behind to a goal from Gylfi Sigurdsson that was unbelievable because Peter Gulacsi is one of the best goalkeepers in Europe. He had never committed a mistake like that and never will again. We needed five to ten minutes to recover, but then we dominated the match. We won because we deserved to, but when you score two goals in the 87th and 92nd minute, it's also because of luck.

Will you play the match winner, Dominik Szoboszlai, in a classic No.10 role?
Dominik can play like a classic No.10, although at Red Bull Salzburg he played more like a typical left-winger. He defends as well, but generally when Salzburg had possession, he positioned himself in between the lines. He has the freedom to roam around. In the national team he has played in this position a lot, in particular when we play a 4-3-2-1, but also in the 3-5-2. In my view, his natural position is the No.10.

You called Peter Gulacsi one of the best keepers in Europe. What are his qualities?
Peter is a very complete goalkeeper. He is

Hero...Dominik Szoboszlai seals qualification

able in goal, with great reactions and great reflexes. He is good enough playing with his feet as well. I think he is a really complete goalkeeper. In the last couple of years, his level has grown a lot.

How important is your captain Adam Szalai as a motivational leader and also as the anchor in the pressing system?
He is a very important leader, but also from a tactical point of view he is very important because he is the only central striker in Hungary with physical characteristics that allow us to play long balls when we are under pressure. He is able to hold the ball up and give the team time to move up the field. Of course, he also needs to be in shape. Last autumn, he was not in the right shape because he was not playing.

What is your assessment of Group F, the so-called "group of death"?
When you face France and see the kind of players they have, it looks quite impossible to have a chance to be successful against them. But in football you can never say never. On paper, we are going to play the Euros at home and probably we will have zero points, but the way we lose will be important. I want to see a team that is not afraid of playing against these kind of players, that wants to go toe-to-toe, that wants to be aggressive and is not scared of them.

Do you think that having nothing to lose actually gives you an advantage?
No! We have three matches and if we lose all three, everyone will remember that. So it will be really tough, really difficult for us, but one way or another we will learn to fight to get at least one or two points. It will be very difficult, but we'll do our best.

Samindra Kunti

Assistant...Zoltan Gera is one of Rossi's right-hand men

TACTICS

Defensive priorities

For most games, Marco Rossi sets up the same 3-5-2 formation that helped him win the Hungarian title with Honved in 2017. Three at the back is usually a given, with the two flank players in the midfield raiding and covering. Another given is the tendency of goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi to patrol outside his area when occasion demands, Manuel Neuer-style. Centre-back Attila Szalai is comfortable on the left, too.

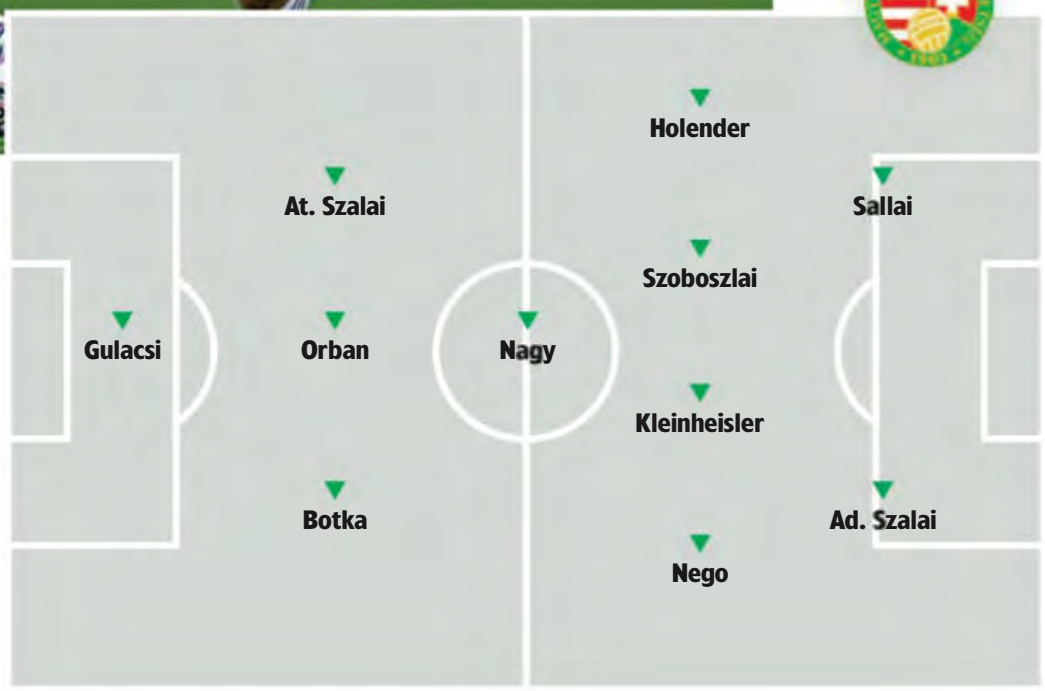
Roving in front of the back three, Adam Nagy spends 90 minutes in the middle third, delivering passes, picking up loose balls, constantly available. This allows the attacking midfielders, Dominik Szoboszlai and probably Laszlo Kleinheisler, in the absence of Zsolt Kalmar, to risk forward runs and worry defenders.

Guile rather than height characterises the front two, running on to the incisive passes into the box. The ageing but savvy Nemanja Nikolic is often brought on to poach in the last 20 minutes, illustrated by his play-off goal against Bulgaria.

Facing formidable teams, Rossi has deployed a 4-5-1 formation, such as away to Croatia in qualifying – resulting in a 3-0 defeat settled before half-time.

Protector...Adam Nagy sits in front of the defence

Sweeper-keeper... Peter Gulacsi is comfortable with the ball at his feet



SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 4
v **Cyprus**
(h, Budapest)
Jun 8
v **Republic of Ireland**
(h, Budapest)

Free-kicks...set-piece specialist Szoboszlai

GROUP GAMES
Jun 15
v **Portugal**
(Budapest)
Jun 19
v **France**
(Budapest)
Jun 23
v **Germany**
(Munich)

THE VIEW FROM HUNGARY

"Hungary adapted well to difficult circumstances, successfully closing 2020 with a team built on the axis of Gulacsi, Orban and Szoboszlai. In such a difficult group, Marco Rossi's team can play freely. Every goal scored or point won would be a huge success."

Janos Hrutka, ex-international, TV2 Akademia

"Euro 2016 took Hungary in a good direction, with the right mix of youth and experience. We now have a more strategic, Italian style that Marco Rossi used at Honved. Dominik Szoboszlai can change a game, but we need everyone to play as a team."

Gabor Kiraly, Euro 2016 goalkeeper

Popular... Rossi

COACH

Marco ROSSI (Ita)
Age 56 (09.09.64)
Appointed June 2018

When the former defender agreed with the outspoken then-Honved owner George F. Hemingway to return to the club back in 2015, nine months after resigning, it was on the condition that compatriot Cosimo Inguscio would be his assistant. Two years later, playing in a 3-5-2 formation, Honved won a first title after 24 years.

The pair now oversee a similarly set up, disciplined and highly-motivated Hungary side. Rossi remains respected by supporters, but Hungary qualifying from Group F will see him deified.

THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

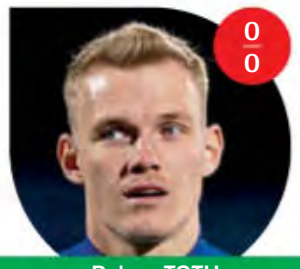
GOALKEEPERS

14 / 0

Denes DIBUSZ
Ferencvaros
Age 30 (16.11.90)
Often outstanding in his club's Champions League run, Dibusz has plenty of international experience should he need to step in.

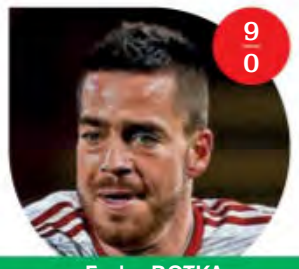
37 / 0

Peter GULACSI
RB Leipzig (Ger)
Age 31 (06.05.90)
Hungary's No.1 since the retirement of Gabor Kiraly after Euro 2016, Gulacsi first gained fame at Leipzig stablemates Red Bull Salzburg.

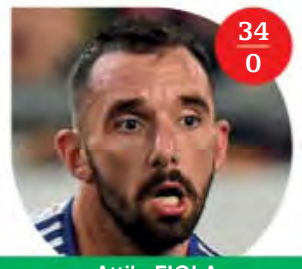

0 / 0

Balazs TOTH
Puskas Akademia
Age 23 (04.09.97)
Impressive performances for Puskas Akademia this spring earned this young keeper a first call-up to the national squad.

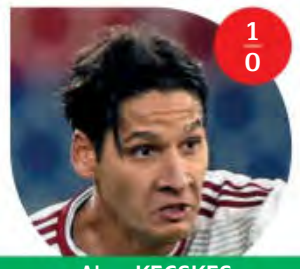
DEFENDERS


9 / 0

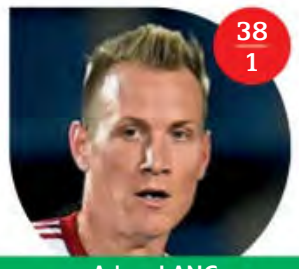
Endre BOTKA
Ferencvaros
Age 26 (25.08.94)
In Marco Rossi's title-winning Honved side of 2016-17, this solid right-back forms part of the domestically dominant Ferencvaros' defence.


34 / 0

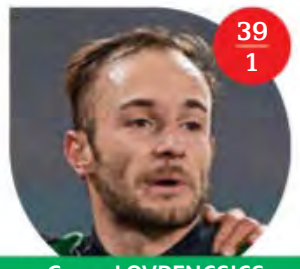
Attila FIOLA
Fehervar
Age 31 (17.02.90)
Right-back Fiola has done a solid job in the Hungarian top flight since 2008. A regular in the national squad and a more defensive option than Nego.


1 / 0

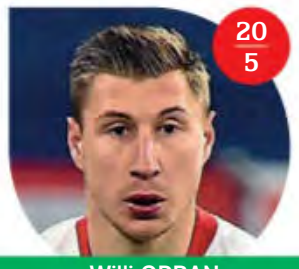
Akos KECSKES
Lugano (Sui)
Age 25 (04.01.96)
Just breaking into the senior side, accomplished Kecskes starred in Hungary's narrow defeat to Brazil at the U20 World Cup in 2015.


38 / 1

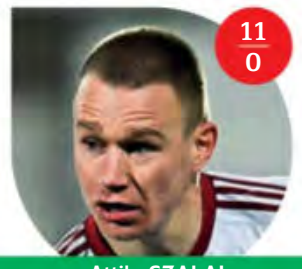
Adam LANG
Omonia Nicosia (Cyp)
Age 28 (17.01.93)
Used more as right-back than centre-back in Hungary's Euro 2016 campaign, this experienced defender has regained his club form in Cyprus at Omonia.


39 / 1

Gergo LOVRENCSICS
Ferencvaros
Age 32 (01.09.88)
Tirelessly pounding up the flank as a right-back or left-back, this regular made his name at Lech Poznan and energised Fradi's Champions League campaign.

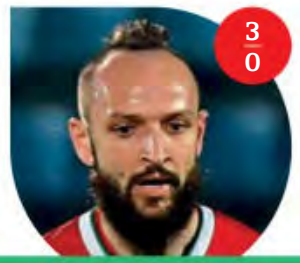

20 / 5

Willi ORBAN
RB Leipzig (Ger)
Age 28 (03.11.92)
Born in Kaiserslautern and won one Germany U21 cap, but Orban chose his father's country of Hungary, making the centre-back spot his own.


11 / 0

Attila SZALAI
Fenerbahce (Tur)
Age 23 (20.01.98)
Left-sided and 6ft 4in tall, this prospect earned a move to Fenerbahce after his two games for Hungary against Turkey last autumn.

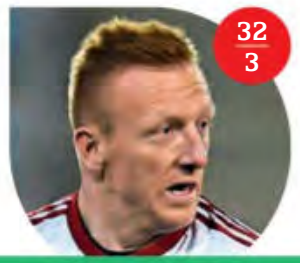
MIDFIELDERS


3 / 0

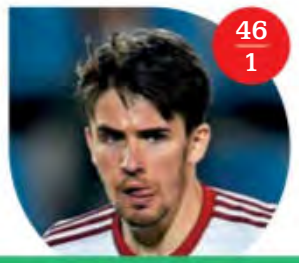
Tamas CSERI
Mezokovesd
Age 33 (15.01.88)
Diminutive Cseri has been behind the rise of little Mezokovesd, earning the Mohawk-haired dynamo a first cap at the age of 32.

14 / 1

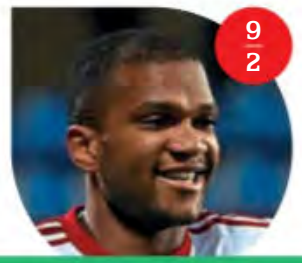
Filip HOLENDER
Partizan Belgrade (Srb)
Age 26 (27.07.94)
Raiding on either flank for Hungary, Holender was essential to Marco Rossi's title-winning Honved side in 2016-17. On loan at Partizan from Lugano.


32 / 3

Laszlo KLEINHEISLER
Osijek (Cro)
Age 27 (08.04.94)
Burst into the national side during Euro 2016 qualifying, "Scholes" has rediscovered his club form just in time for the Euros.


46 / 1

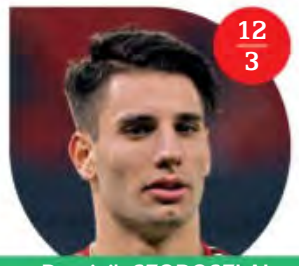
Adam NAGY
Bristol City (Eng)
Age 25 (17.06.95)
Assured performances at Euro 2016 when only 20 earned this industrious defensive midfielder a move to Serie A. Absolutely indispensable for Hungary.


9 / 2

Loic NEGO
Fehervar
Age 30 (15.01.91)
A European champion for a star-studded France U19 side in 2010, the Nantes-trained midfield shield took Hungarian nationality in 2019.

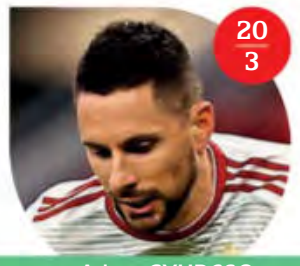
12 / 1

David SIGER
Ferencvaros
Age 30 (30.11.90)
Integral to Fradi's Champions League successes, boisterous late developer Siger is a welcome presence in the national set-up.

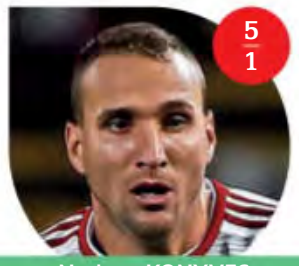

12 / 3

Dominik SZOBOSZLAI
RB Leipzig (Ger)
Age 20 (25.10.00)
Wonder boy and free-kick expert Szoboszlai will need match practice after injury stalled his Leipzig debut. Record Hungarian transfer in late 2020.

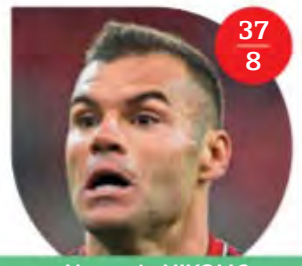
FORWARDS


20 / 3

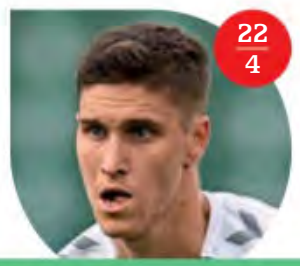
Adam GYURCSO
Osijek (Cro)
Age 30 (06.03.91)
Flank player may make a stronger case for more regular national-team action with his recent move to ambitious Osijek.


5 / 1

Norbert KONYVES
Zalaegerszeg
Age 31 (10.06.89)
Brought into the national set-up at the ripe old age of 31, this Serbia-born forward scored the winning goal on his debut – against Serbia.


37 / 8

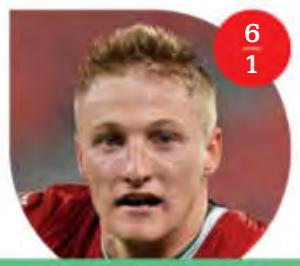
Nemanja NIKOLIC
Fehervar
Age 33 (31.12.87)
Top league scorer when playing for Videoton, Legia Warsaw and Chicago Fire, wily Nikolic was persuaded out of international retirement by Marco Rossi.


22 / 4

Roland SALLAI
Freiburg (Ger)
Age 23 (22.05.97)
Not prolific but tireless, making intelligent runs and providing options. Szoboszlai hit Hungary's crucial play-off goal – but Sallai drew away Iceland's defenders.

70 / 23

Adam SZALAI
Mainz (Ger)
Age 33 (09.12.87)
The spirit of Hungary's 2016 revival, Szalai will give 100 per cent at what will be his last finals, motivating team-mates on and off the pitch.


6 / 1

Kevin VARGA
Kasimpasa (Tur)
Age 24 (30.03.96)
The selfless, pacy Varga proved his worth with his debut goal against Turkey in November, brilliantly running from deep in stoppage time.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Lajos HEGEDUS (Paks)
DEFENDERS Barnabas BESE (OH Leuven, Blg), Szilveszter HANGYA (Fehervar), Mihaly KORHUT (Debrecen)
MIDFIELDERS Daniel GAZDAG (Honved), Zsolt KALMAR (DAC, Svk) *injured*, Andras SCHAFER (DAC, Svk)
FORWARDS Roland VARGA (MTK), Krisztian GERESI (Puskas Akademia)

Back at the top table

After failing to qualify for World Cup 2018, Italy are seeking to rediscover old magic

It is a notorious football cliché to suggest that, when it comes to World Cup and European Championship finals tournaments, you disregard Italy at your peril. But, in fact, there are good reasons to suggest that to ignore the four-time World Cup winners this summer could be even more dangerous than usual.

The point is, Italy are desperately glad to be back at the top table of European football after their miserable failure to qualify for Russia 2018, a setback that experienced Italian central defender Giorgio Chiellini recently described as "the lowest point for Italian football in the last 50 years".

Not only will Italy come into Euro 2020 sharply motivated by the pain of that catastrophic failure, but they do so with a new vibrant team which, under the inspired guidance of accomplished coach Roberto Mancini, cruised through qualifying in some style, winning all ten matches and conceding just four goals in the process.

Admittedly, that qualifying group was not exactly the most intimidating (Greece, Finland, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Armenia and Liechtenstein were the opponents), but you can only beat what's in front of you. Recent results would suggest that their first-round opponents Turkey and Switzerland, for example, may prove tougher nuts to crack.

Next generation... Nicolo Barella and Moise Kean

The important consideration is that Mancini has rejected the sacred Italian national team creed of "first defend... and then score if you can". His side plays a more attacking game and defends from the halfway line. He uses lightweight but creative midfielders (Jorginho and Marco Verratti), attacking full-backs (Emerson, Leonardo Spinazzola and Alessandro Florenzi) and a nippy little winger/inside forward (Lorenzo Insigne).

Whilst many coaches will have been disappointed with the postponement of Euro 2020, it is at least arguable that the extra year could yet work in Italy's favour. For a start, it has given what was originally a new team extra time to prepare and form an ever more solid structure.

That unit comprises the classic mix of youth and experience, newcomers to the *Azzurri* scene and household names. International supporters need little introduction to stars such as the Juventus defensive duo of Leonardo Bonucci and Chiellini. Yet these are only two out of six in the probable squad (reserve goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu, defender Florenzi and forwards Insigne and Ciro Immobile are the others) who have ever played at this level before.

> Mancini has rejected the sacred Italian national team creed of "first defend…and then score if you can". His side plays a more attacking game and defends from the halfway line

If Mancini's team can overcome that inexperience, then they might well spring a surprise at Euro 2020. Never rule out the Italians.

Paddy Agnew

ROBERTO MANCINI

How do you rate Italy's chances of going all the way at Euro 2020?
Even when Italy are not the favourites, we are under pressure to win. I know that we have a group of good players who are getting better game by game and who will give their all.

And what are your thoughts on a draw that pits you against Switzerland, Wales and Turkey in Group A?
You could say that the draw went well for us, given that we have avoided France and Portugal. However, they are all awkward teams with nothing to lose. Switzerland are always difficult for Italy because they know us well. Wales could be a surprise with all their Premier League players, whilst Turkey took four points off France in the qualifiers. Playing in Rome could help us but they are all difficult games.

How proud are you to coach the *Azzurri*?
[To coach Italy] has always been an aspiration of mine and it has come at the right time. Something has to be done for the national team. I was thinking about this when I decided I wanted to leave Zenit. I believe my parents will be proud of me.

2019-20 Golden Shoe winner...Ciro Immobile

What did you learn from the 2022 World Cup qualifiers in March, when you extended your unbeaten run even further?
Those three games in seven days were really tough and that is something we've got to keep in mind for the future. I think increasing the squad sizes for Euro 2020 is entirely legitimate given the current situation. The problem would be if something were to happen to a player, it would be difficult to go and get a replacement because he would be off on his holidays.

After beating Lithuania 2-0 in March, you equalled Marcello Lippi's record of going 25 international games undefeated as Italy coach. How proud are you of that?
If we've got close to a guy like Lippi, who has won a World Cup, that means we're doing a good job. Lippi and I both played for Sampdoria and that's a great thing in itself, but now I would like to follow his path and develop a really strong national team over time. I hope that I can still be compared to him in two years' time: that would mean that we have also done something really important.

What are the chances of young playmaker Nicolo Zaniolo being fit in time for the European Championship?
Obviously we are keeping a close eye on him. We will be thinking about him and we will assess him when he comes back for his club [Roma]. At the same time, we cannot take the risk of calling him up if he is not ready. He is a young player and he will have other important competitions in front of him in the future.

Paddy Agnew

Mancini discovery... Nicolo Zaniolo

TACTICS

The new, modern Italy

With Mancini's Italy, you could argue that his appointment has prompted not so much a change of tactics, as a change of mentality. Successful and traditional Italian "defence first" methods have given way to a more modern approach, even if his team concedes few goals.

Mancini's Italy are not afraid to take the game to their opponents, to rely on the lightweight talent of Italo-Brazilian Jorginho, Marco Verratti and Nicolo Barella in midfield, as well as Federico Chiesa and Lorenzo Insigne in attack.

In theory, his side lines up in a 4-3-3, a formation that can become 4-1-4-1 if and when Jorginho (or Manuel Locatelli) sits deep in defence and when wide men Chiesa and Insigne drop back to leave Ciro Immobile (or Andrea Belotti) up front as the central target man.

By orthodox Italy standards, this team defends high up the field, ready to take an obvious risk, whilst the full-backs move forward into wide attacking roles. For many modern teams, this is normal enough but, for Italy, the requisite high work rate seems almost revolutionary.

In the qualifiers it worked wonders, but will it hold up against tougher opposition?

Midfield maestros... Jorginho and Marco Verratti

Defensive duo... Giorgio Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
May 28
v **San Marino**
(h, Cagliari)
Jun 4
v **Czech Republic**
(h, Bologna)

Stadio Olimpico...Italy will play all of their group games at home

GROUP GAMES
Jun 11
v **Turkey**
(Rome)
Jun 16
v **Switzerland**
(Rome)
Jun 20
v **Wales**
(Rome)

THE VIEW FROM ITALY

"I can see Italy getting to the semi-finals. Mancini has done a great job, but how will his "*palleggio*" football stand up against the strongest sides? They also probably do not score as much as they should. The fact that Mancini continues to alternate Immobile with Belotti as his centre-forward makes you wonder."

Enrico Curro, la Repubblica

"We're not accustomed to an Italy that plays so well, that attempts to dominate, it's not a traditional Italian defensive game they play. We're surprised to come to Euro 2020 with an exciting team and one which is a worthy representative of Italy's football tradition and history."

Fabio Licari, Gazzetta dello Sport

Improvement... Mancini has transformed Italy's fortunes

COACH

Roberto MANCINI
Age 56 (27.11.64)
Appointed May 2018

Outrageously talented as a player, there are good grounds for arguing Mancini is an even better coach. As a player, he won Serie A titles with Sampdoria and Lazio. However, as a coach, he has not only won three Serie A titles with Internazionale, but was only the second Italian to win a Premier League trophy.

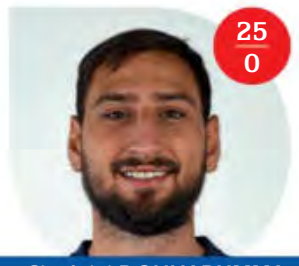
As Italy coach, he has thus far been outstanding, qualifying stylishly for Euro 2020, with a record that reads 21 wins, seven draws and only two defeats in his first 30 games in charge. His approach as Italy coach has been illuminating.

THE SQUAD

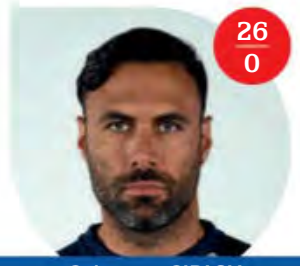
● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

Alessio CRAGNO
Cagliari
Age 26 (28.06.94)
Been kept busy all season at relegation-battling Cagliari, more than living up to his nickname, "Spider Man". Won 12 Under-21 caps.

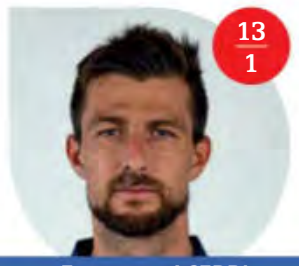


Gianluigi DONNARUMMA
Milan
Age 22 (25.02.99)
Given that he made his Italy debut aged 17, Donnarumma is already a six-season Italy veteran. Considered the best Italian keeper of his generation.

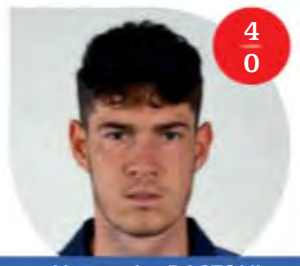


Salvatore SIRIGU
Torino
Age 34 (12.01.87)
Immensely experienced keeper who first played for Italy in 2010, and subsequently at the 2014 World Cup and Euro 2016. More than capable if required.

DEFENDERS



Francesco ACERBI
Lazio
Age 33 (10.02.88)
A regular squad member under Mancini in the role of reserve central defender, Acerbi has been key for Lazio over the last two seasons.



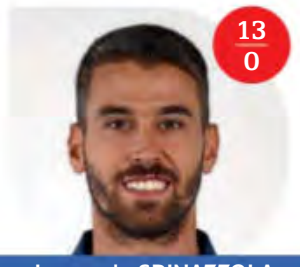
Alessandro BASTONI
Internazionale
Age 22 (13.04.99)
A product of the prolific Atalanta youth system, Bastoni made his debut in November. Left footed and versatile, he can play at left-back or in central defence.

Leonardo BONUCCI
Juventus
Age 34 (01.05.87)
The vice-captain is one of Italy's most important players and forms an intimidating defensive partnership with Chiellini. Automatic first choice.

Giorgio CHIELLINI
Juventus
Age 36 (14.08.84)
The Italy captain is an old-style centre-back who takes no prisoners. He is an automatic selection, only recurring injuries can exclude him from the squad.

EMERSON
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 26 (03.08.94)
Represents the new face of Italy: Brazilian-born, Italian naturalised, Santos educated and plays in England. A regular despite a lack of club games.

Alessandro FLORENZI
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 30 (11.03.91)
Brings both experience and versatility to the party in that he can double up as a right-back or a right-sided midfielder. A regular in either position for six seasons.



Leonardo SPINAZZOLA
Roma
Age 28 (25.03.93)
Another of those modern players who combines pace with versatility. Attacking full-back that can play on either side of the defence or on the wing.

MIDFIELDERS

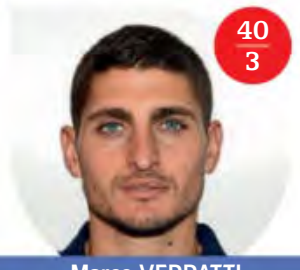
Nicolo BARELLA
Internazionale
Age 24 (07.02.97)
A modern midfielder who combines dynamic covering with quality play in attack. Debuted in 2018, so all caps have been won under Mancini.

JORGINHO
Chelsea (Eng)
Age 29 (20.12.91)
Another of the Italo-Brazilians, Jorginho started nine out of ten qualifiers. Shares playmaking duties with Verratti in front of the back four. Takes penalties.

Manuel LOCATELLI
Sassuolo
Age 23 (08.01.98)
A recent squad addition, he made a huge impression on his debut in the Nations League win in Amsterdam last September. Back-up for Jorginho or Verratti.

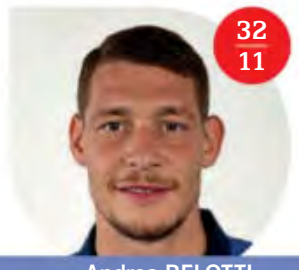
Lorenzo PELLEGRINI
Roma
Age 24 (19.06.96)
Attacking midfielder with a penchant for the long-range shot, Pellegrini also works hard in defence. An established and very useful squad player.

Matteo PESSINA
Atalanta
Age 24 (21.04.97)
Pessina may seem like a long shot for the squad, but his excellent season at Atalanta might persuade Mancini to take a chance with him.



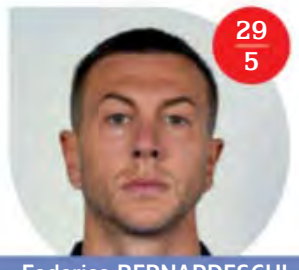
Marco VERRATTI
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 28 (05.11.92)
One of the more experienced members of the team, having featured for Italy for the last nine years. Forms a lightweight but creative duo with Jorginho.

FORWARDS

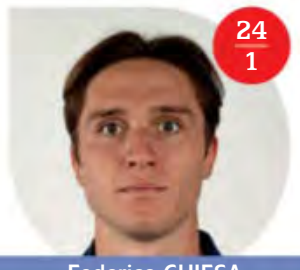


Andrea BELOTTI
Torino
Age 27 (20.12.93)
One of two strikers, along with Immobile, who will alternate during the tournament. Belotti is the more direct of the two, a classic target man.

Domenico BERARDI
Sassuolo
Age 26 (01.08.94)
Did his chances no harm by scoring a brilliant goal in Italy's win against Northern Ireland in March. One of two Sassuolo players likely to get a call-up.



Federico BERNARDESCHI
Juventus
Age 27 (16.02.94)
A left-winger with the versatility to play on the right or even in defence. Used in eight out of ten Euro 2020 qualifiers, so very likely to make the squad.



Federico CHIESA
Juventus
Age 23 (25.10.97)
Son of Enrico, Federico moved from Fiorentina to Juventus last October. Current flying form and ability to play on either wing make him a likely first choice.

Ciro IMMOBILE
Lazio
Age 31 (20.02.90)
Like Belotti, Immobile is a player who puts himself about a lot. A prolific goalscorer in Serie A, he has never looked quite so potent at international level.

Lorenzo INSIGNE
Napoli
Age 29 (04.06.91)
Essentially a reserve at Euro 2016, this tournament could be a last chance for the Napoli captain to underline his class on the international stage.

Moise KEAN
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 21 (28.02.00)
Born in Italy to Ivorian parents, Kean won his first Italy cap in November 2018. His loan to PSG from Everton seems to have given him a major boost.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Alex MERET (Napoli)
DEFENDERS Davide CALABRIA (Milan), Danilo D'AMBROSIO (Internazionale), Giovanni DI LORENZO (Napoli), Gianluca MANCINI (Roma), Rafael TOLOI (Atalanta)
MIDFIELDERS Gaetano CASTROVELLI (Fiorentina), Bryan CRISTANTE (Roma), Stefano SENSI (Internazionale), Sandro TONALI (Milan), Nicolo ZANIOLO (Roma)
FORWARDS Francesco CAPUTO (Sassuolo), Stephan EL SHAARAWY (Roma)

Back on the big stage

The right moment or a tournament too soon?

It will be one of the most interesting questions of Euro 2020. What can be expected of the Dutch team after missing the last two major tournaments?

After being runners-up at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and finishing third four years later, the national team fell into disrepair. The likes of Wesley Sneijder and Arjen Robben said farewell without any others of the same quality succeeding them. As a result, *Oranje* failed to qualify for both Euro 2016 and the 2018 World Cup.

Now a new generation has emerged, one that appears able to compete with Germany, Belgium, France and Spain. Important players like Virgil van Dijk, Matthijs de Ligt, Frenkie de Jong and Memphis Depay are the backbone of the team that showed class in reaching the inaugural Nations League final.

There is a strong reminiscence with the 1980s. After Euro '80, *Oranje* failed to qualify for three tournaments in a row before clinching silverware at Euro '88. That first and only silverware was thanks to another group of new kids on the block, including Ronald Koeman, Frank Rijkaard, Ruud Gullit and Marco van Basten. Players who, much like the current crop, played at Europe's top clubs and had won titles before starting the tournament. So the ingredients to do it again are there. However, there are also issues that will concern supporters.

Pivotal... Van Dijk

> De Boer's track record (three sackings in his last three jobs) isn't convincing, nor was his start as *Oranje* head coach

First of all, it is vital that Van Dijk is fit in time. Internazionale's Stefan de Vrij is a worthy replacement, but he doesn't have the commanding influence and charisma of the Liverpool man. The evidence of what his absence can take away from a team can be seen clearly at Anfield this season and, if he is also unavailable for his national side, he will be missed dearly. The same goes for other key players like De Jong or Depay. Without them, the team is mediocre.

The second question mark hangs over the coach Frank de Boer. The Netherlands' recent success was partly based on Koeman's charisma and tactics. More than once, Koeman had to restore things at half-time or during the match as the Dutch failed to remain dominant or consistent for an entire match. De Boer's track record (three sackings in his last three jobs) isn't convincing, nor was his start as *Oranje* head coach.

He isn't helped by the fact that there are some weak spots in the team. It says enough that one goalkeeper, Tim Krul, isn't playing at the highest level. And what about a back-up for Depay? The days of the Dutch attack being its strongest department are over.

It helps to have three home games against Ukraine, Austria and North Macedonia in the group stage, even if spectators aren't allowed. What happens next is up for debate. Is it the right time or is this tournament too soon for this generation?

Klaas-Jan Droppert

FRANK DE BOER

What's the biggest strength of this current Dutch team?
We mainly have very good players: this is a beautiful generation and we have proven that we are a very strong collective. We never give up and we have often come back from behind. Both on and off the pitch, our group of players is closely knit and that is beautiful to watch.

How do you assess your opponents in Group C at this summer's European Championship?
Around me, I hear that we have an easy group, but I do not agree. For several years, Austria has been a good football country with players that perform in the top league. Ukraine has also proven, during the qualifiers as well, that they are strong and can obtain results against the big countries. North Macedonia is a bit more unknown to us, but experience teaches us that countries from that region often have good players. This aside, I believe that there are no longer small countries: nowadays everybody plays good and organised football and can make things difficult for any opponent. We must progress from this group, but that won't simply be a piece of cake.

New generation... Memphis Depay and Donny van de Beek

You do have very little time to prepare. Is that a problem?
We must live with that. We know that coronavirus has changed many things. It makes no sense to complain about it. We will adapt to the circumstances.

How will you prepare for the European Championship during these times?
It is not easy now to get to the stadium or to the players so we must work more from our homes. That is not ideal, but we have everything very well under control. We see the players once a week. And also our meetings are taking place as usual, admittedly in a digital way.

What will the Netherlands' objectives be at this tournament?
If we are good and everything goes the way we have planned, we can beat anybody. That should, I think, always be the ambition: wanting to win. But there are a lot of favourites: I think that seven to eight countries can win it. Being realistic, I would say a place in the semi-finals would be a good result for us. But once again, winning is always the ambition.

Do you think that captain Virgil van Dijk will be fit in time?
That will be a race against the clock, but we hope to succeed. He is an important player, both on and off the pitch. But it has to be in a responsible way.

What do you think of a European Championship without fans?
We have to wait and see whether it will be possible to have fans. We all prefer to play in a full stadium, but we are not the ones to take those decisions. We play all of our group games in Amsterdam. It would be a pity if that is in an empty stadium.

Samindra Kunti

Smiles...the Dutch team during the Nations League

TACTICS

4-3-3 with a twist

The Netherlands will play a 4-3-3 system, but with a tweak. Up front Memphis Depay has the freedom to wander, while the wingers often have to drop deep. Who will be on the flanks is still open for debate, although PSV's Donyell Malen should be one of them. An alternative front-line could see Luuk de Jong lead the attack as a target man with Depay deployed on the left wing.

In midfield, Frenkie de Jong and Georginio Wijnaldum are key. But who will be the man for the defensive duties? Atalanta's Marten de Roon is favourite, but is often criticised for his inferior build-up qualities. De Boer tried Davy Klaassen, however his habit of getting forward leaves the team vulnerable to counter attacks. Donny van de Beek's chances of starting have been hampered by his lack of game time at club level.

If Virgil van Dijk doesn't recover in time, Stefan de Vrij will be a solid successor. De Boer could also opt for a 5-3-2 system, especially against stronger teams. Apart from De Vrij, Nathan Ake is a contender for the third centre-back position. That gives Denzel Dumfries and the currently injured Daley Blind the opportunity to go forward, something that suits both.

Key player... Wijnaldum

Plan B... Luuk de Jong

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 2
v **Scotland**
(n, Faro)
Jun 6
v **Georgia**
(h, Enschede)

Johan Cruyff Arena... the venue for all of the *Oranje*'s group games

GROUP GAMES
Jun 13
v **Ukraine**
(Amsterdam)
Jun 17
v **Austria**
(Amsterdam)
Jun 21
v **North Macedonia**
(Amsterdam)

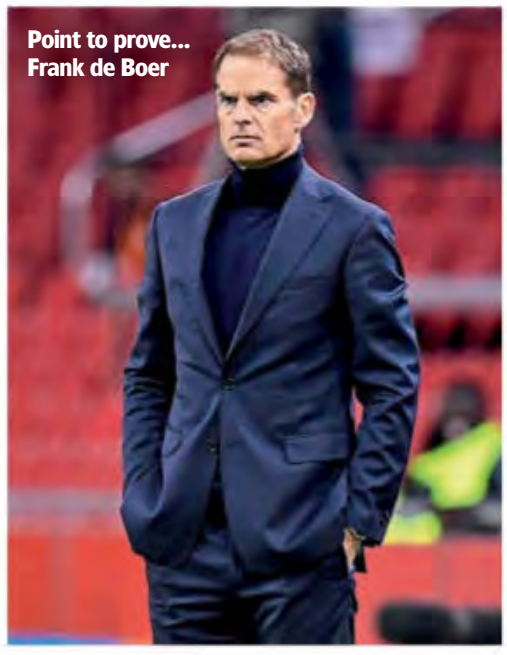
THE VIEW FROM NETHERLANDS

"He knows what he wants and he has got vision. If Frank can totally focus on football, with a coaching staff he can trust, then he is a tremendous coach. On the pitch, he was always coaching and now he has become wiser and more mature off the pitch as well."

Ronald de Boer, Frank's twin brother and ESPN pundit

"The Netherlands can make it to the quarter-finals and from that moment luck, penalties and having a good or bad day will decide how far they will come. The postponement was an advantage because they have gained extra experience playing top matches."

Aad de Mos, former coach and pundit



Point to prove... Frank de Boer

COACH

Frank DE BOER
Age 50 (15.05.70)
Appointed September 2020

Capped 112 times, the former Ajax and Barcelona player knows what it means to play for the national team. De Boer started his coaching career as Bert van Marwijk's assistant, reaching the 2010 World Cup final, and he had a flying start at club level too after winning four league titles and the Dutch Super Cup on his own two feet at Ajax.

However, early exits at Crystal Palace, Internazionale and Atlanta United have raised question as to whether he is the right man to lead the *Oranje*. He wasn't first choice to succeed Ronald Koeman.

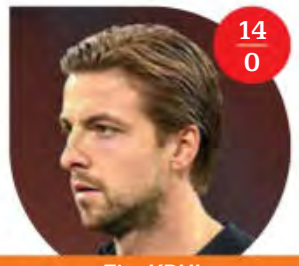
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

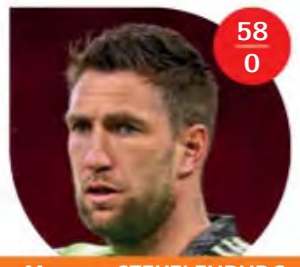
GOALKEEPERS

60 / 0

Jasper CILLESSEN
Valencia (Spa)
Age 32 (22.04.89)
If he is fit and remains a regular for his club, the reliable Cillessen will stand between the posts, just as he did at the 2014 World Cup.


14 / 0

Tim KRUL
Norwich City (Eng)
Age 33 (04.03.88)
Came off the bench in the final minute of the game to become the hero when penalties decided the World Cup quarter-final against Costa Rica in 2014.


58 / 0

Maarten STEKELENBURG
Ajax
Age 38 (22.09.82)
Returned to the Ajax first team after Andre Onana's doping ban, and earned a surprise international recall three and a half years after his last cap.

DEFENDERS

19 / 2

Nathan AKE
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 26 (18.02.95)
All-rounder who can play left-back, centre-back or midfield. Son of an Ivorian father but opted for the *Oranje*. Left home to join Chelsea at 15.

77 / 2

Daley BLIND
Ajax
Age 31 (09.03.90)
Returned to Ajax after four years at Manchester United. Hoping, and expected, to recover from an ankle injury in time for the finals.

26 / 2

Matthijs DE LIGT
Juventus (Ita)
Age 21 (12.08.99)
After a dreadful debut against Bulgaria, came back strongly to become regarded as one of Europe's best. Strong, technically gifted and an aerial threat.

43 / 4

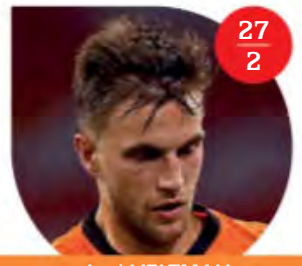
Stefan DE VRIJ
Internazionale (Ita)
Age 29 (05.02.92)
One of Serie A's best defenders but only an understudy when Van Dijk and De Ligt are fit. A master at fulfilling his duties. Joined Lazio from Feyenoord.

17 / 0

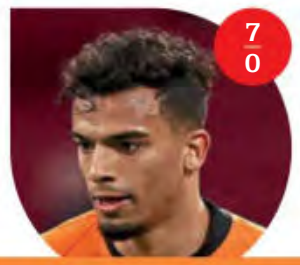
Denzel DUMFRIES
PSV
Age 25 (18.04.96)
Seven years ago the running freight train was still an amateur, before Sparta signed him. Now PSV skipper. Played twice for Aruba before opting for *Oranje*.

38 / 4

Virgil VAN DIJK
Liverpool (Eng)
Age 29 (08.07.91)
On and off the pitch, the towering skipper is a vital part of the team and forms one of Europe's best defensive partnerships with De Ligt.


27 / 2

Joel VELTMAN
Brighton & Hove Albion (Eng)
Age 29 (15.01.92)
Stand-in who can play right-back or centre-back, who De Boer knows from his Ajax period. Recently gained a place in the starting line-up at Brighton.

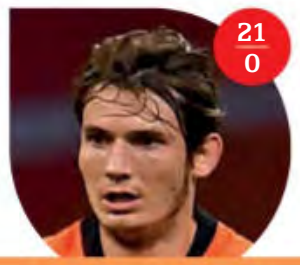

7 / 0

Owen WIJNDAL
AZ
Age 21 (28.11.99)
Upcoming left-back who debuted in October. Likely to start if Blind moves to central defence. Like Stengs and Malen, is of Surinamese descent.

MIDFIELDERS

25 / 1

Frenkie DE JONG
Barcelona (Spa)
Age 24 (12.05.97)
Midfield maestro and *Oranje*'s biggest creative talent who makes football look easy. As a youth he turned down Feyenoord for Willem II.


21 / 0

Marten DE ROON
Atalanta (Ita)
Age 30 (29.03.91)
Tactically strong but not the most technically gifted. Played for Sparta and Heerenveen, then returned to Atalanta after a year at Middlesbrough.

3 / 0

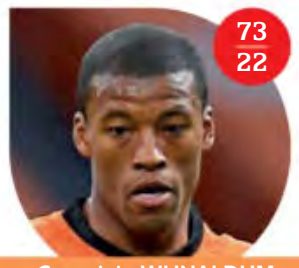
Ryan GRAVENBERCH
Ajax
Age 18 (16.05.02)
Ajax's youngest debutant and the next big thing coming through their ranks. Blessed with pace and physicality, he's already been compared with Paul Pogba.

22 / 5

Davy KLAASSEN
Ajax
Age 28 (21.02.93)
Returned to Ajax after spells at Everton and Werder Bremen. Once an attacking midfielder, now plays deeper due to his work rate and tactical acumen.

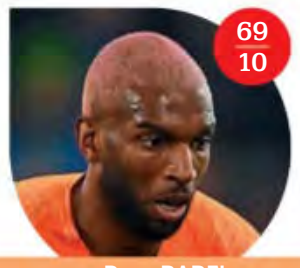
19 / 3

Donny VAN DE BEEK
Manchester United (Eng)
Age 24 (18.04.97)
Has endured a difficult time in England, but has lots to offer. Wears the No.34 in tribute to Abdelhak Nouri, who collapsed during an Ajax friendly.


73 / 22

Georginio WIJNALDUM
Liverpool (Eng)
Age 30 (11.11.90)
Midfield motor who keeps the team together, the indefatigable vice-captain is always where he is needed. Was the Netherlands' top scorer during the qualifiers.

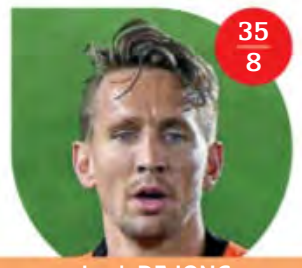
FORWARDS


69 / 10

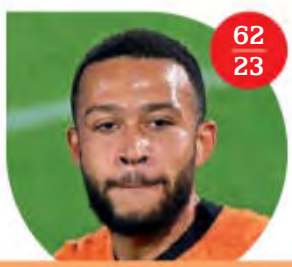
Ryan BABEL
Galatasaray (Tur)
Age 34 (19.12.86)
Winger with a CV that contains Ajax, Liverpool, Al Ain, Fulham and Kasimpasa. Omitted for six years before Ronald Koeman recalled him.

24 / 2

Steven BERGHUIS
Feyenoord
Age 29 (19.12.91)
A winger who is more successful at club level than in the national team. Took five years and 23 caps to score his maiden goal in March's World Cup qualifiers.


35 / 8

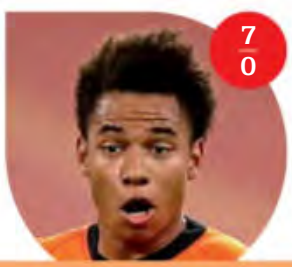
Luuk DE JONG
Sevilla (Spa)
Age 30 (27.08.90)
Born in Switzerland to Dutch professional volleyball players. Often regarded too good for the Eredivisie but not good enough abroad. De Boer's Plan B.


62 / 23

Memphis DEPAY
Lyon (Fra)
Age 27 (13.02.94)
Eccentric, often misunderstood due to his tattoos and bizarre fashion sense. Tore cruciate ligaments last year so benefitted from the Euros' postponement.

8 / 2

Donyell MALEN
PSV
Age 22 (19.01.99)
Left Ajax for Arsenal at 16, but joined PSV two years later. Scored on his debut v Germany. Another who would have missed last year's event through injury.


7 / 0

Calvin STENGS
AZ
Age 22 (18.12.98)
De Boer's son-in-law and a lively winger. Had to overcome a cruciate ligament injury when missing the 2017-2018 season. More a creator than a finisher.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Marco BIZOT (AZ)
DEFENDERS Sven BOTMAN (Lille, Fra), Hans HATEBOER (Atalanta, Ita), Jerry ST. JUSTE (Mainz, Ger), Kenny TETE (Fulham, Eng), Patrick VAN AANHOLT (Crystal Palace, Eng)
MIDFIELDERS Teun KOOPMEINERS (AZ), Kevin STROOTMAN (Genoa, Ita), Tonny VILHENA (Krasnodar, Rus)
FORWARDS Steven BERGWIJN (Tottenham Hotspur, Eng), Myron BOADU (AZ), Quincy PROMES (Spartak Moscow, Rus), Wout WEGHORST (Wolfsburg, Ger)

Dangerous underdogs

But national team coach Igor Angelovski remains under fire despite historic success

The new format of UEFA qualifiers was key in helping North Macedonia reach their first-ever major tournament. After winning Group D4 of the 2018-19 Nations League with five wins and one defeat they were assured of a Euro 2020 qualifying play-off place.

Injuries and a coronavirus outbreak meant that their semi-final draw with Kosovo, followed by a trip to Georgia, were far from easy obstacles. Yet captain Goran Pandev netted his 36th goal on his 114th appearance in Tbilisi, securing an historic win and the joy of the entire nation. Prime minister Zoran Zaev even rewarded every player with an extra bonus for their efforts.

The good spirits, however, did not last. Captain Pandev led protests against the FA when president Muamed Sejdini failed to back coach Angelovski, in spite of the good results. "I am under the impression that the president and his people are not happy because we qualified to the Euros," Pandev stated in an interview with television channel *24 News*. Sejdini himself cuts a controversial figure, yet retained his presidency in March thanks to support from FIFA and UEFA. The atmosphere, however, is still delicate, and fans are hoping this won't affect the action on the pitch

The team itself is undoubtedly one of the competition's biggest underdogs. Of their three group stage opponents, their only reasonable record is against Ukraine – with one win, one draw and two defeats – but they were beaten 4-1 by Austria in Skopje two years ago and 2-1 that same year. Two draws with the Netherlands in the mid-2000s provide fond memories, but will offer little hope in their final group stage clash. Still, they will take great confidence from March's stunning 2-1 2022 World Cup qualifying victory over Germany in March, which proved that North Macedonia are not to be underestimated.

That win ended Joachim Low's side's 35-game unbeaten run in World Cup qualifying, and proved that, even with just 30 per cent possession of the ball, North Macedonia can hold their own against the very best.

Proud...prime minister of North Macedonia Zoran Zaev

It is still hard to believe that miracles such as the success in Germany can be repeated at this summer's event

It is still hard to believe that miracles such as the success in Germany can be repeated at this summer's event. Qualification for Euro 2020 is a great success in itself, so there is nothing to lose for the players who are mostly out of the Champions League scene.

Angelovski believes his team can spring a surprise. As for the supporters, their great hope is that they will be allowed to attend at least one of their fixtures in Bucharest, with the Romanian capital the most accessible of all the host cities. If there are no restrictions, thousands of fans – known as the Falanga, in honour of Alexander the Great's Phalanx – will make the trip to support their national team. And they will be daring to dream.

Milorad Stojmanovski

IGOR ANGELOVSKI

What are your memories from that historic win against Georgia?
That was a moment of great happiness for all the people in North Macedonia. It was one of the best moments in my life and I want to thank the players. They made me one of the happiest men in the world.

You qualified via the Nations League. How do you rate the competition?
I must thank Mr. Ceferin, who made the Nations League and gave the opportunity to the smallest countries to be a part of the Euros. If you play against countries with a similar level, it is easier to qualify for Euro 2020. In the end, we deserved it.

You have only coached in Macedonia. Do you think that is a strength or weakness?
A strength. I know the mentality of the players, and everything that happened in the past. That is why it was easy for me to prepare a strategy. My players are very helpful and in particular my captain Goran Pandev, who is one of the best players in history. He was the leader of the team.

How important is Goran Pandev?
Goran is great. He was a European and

Shock...Goran Pandev celebrates his side's first goal against Germany in March

world champion at club level. Wherever he goes, he makes Macedonian football known. He is very important. I consult him about everything. His experience is great for me as a young coach. In the end I take decisions, but what Pandev thinks is important.

In 2017, North Macedonia qualified for the U21 European Championship and seven players have been promoted to the senior team. How have they developed?
My philosophy is that when a young player deserves the chance to play for the national team and he has the quality, I will give him the opportunity to play. Whether it is one, seven, or ten players, it doesn't matter as long as they have the quality. I believe in every single player that I call up. It is not important if the player is young or old.

How do you see the future of North Macedonia after Euro 2020?
The future is very good. We have a lot of young players coming through. In the future, I think North Macedonia will qualify again for another major finals. We have a generation that went to the elite round at U17 and U19 level. We had the U21s who played in the European Championship. We have a very good future.

Euphoric...Angelovski waves the national flag after guiding North Macedonia to the Euro 2020 play-off final

How do you assess your group draw?
We will play against strong opponents, but we believe in ourselves. We must play at our level, then we will see what happens. Netherlands are the favourites, but the other two teams in our group are also top class. We respect them, but we see possibilities. Why not? In football, everything is possible. North Macedonia's ambition is to present the country at a high level. If we have a chance to take points we will. It makes me happy. We are living the dream.

Samindra Kunti

TACTICS

Nothing to lose

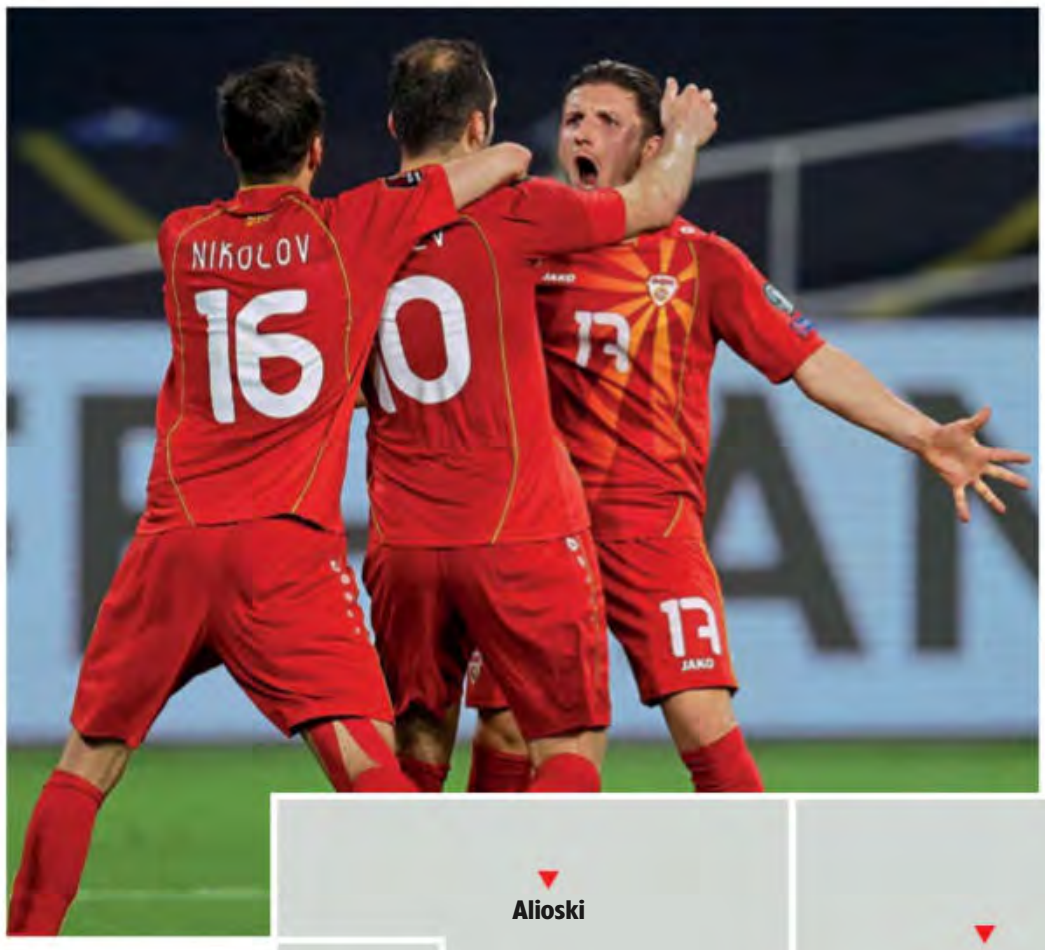
In the Nations League, North Macedonia managed to control games against teams of a similar level with a 4-2-3-1 formation, but versus the Netherlands, Austria and Ukraine at the Euros, the stability of the defence and energy of midfielders Arijan Ademi, Boban Nikolov, Eljif Elmas and Enis Bardhi covering the pitch will be crucial.

Coach Angelovski used 3-5-2 when North Macedonia drew 1-1 with Italy in a 2018 World Cup qualifier, and also in the shock win against Germany in March, and that is a more cautious approach. With a back three, Egzon Bejtulai or Kire Ristevski could join starters Visar Musliu and Darko Velkovski as central defenders, but a more likely option is Stefan Ristovski moving inside and Nikolov playing right wing-back.

Ilija Nestorovski is first-choice striker, but Ivan Trichkovski or Aleksandar Trajkovski offer better defensive skills.

Pandev is the main creator. His scoring capacity and passing ability will see him float behind the striker in a 4-2-3-1, while in a 3-5-2 he stays higher up the pitch.

The team's tactics will be focused on lots of quick passes, the crossing of Enis Bardhi, the agility of wing-backs Ezgjan Alioski and Ristovski, and the lucidity of all-round playmaker Elmas.



Influential...Goran Pandev (middle) is North Macedonia's main creative force

United...North Macedonia celebrate at the end of their play-off semi-final match in qualifying for Euro 2020

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES

May 29
v **Slovenia**
(h, Skopje)

Trusted...North Macedonia goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski

GROUP GAMES

Jun 13
v **Austria**
(Bucharest)
Jun 17
v **Ukraine**
(Bucharest)
Jun 21
v **Netherlands**
(Amsterdam)

THE VIEW FROM MACEDONIA

"A great success and a generation to remember for Macedonian football. They deserved to reach the Euro finals as winners of Path D. In the play-off in Tbilisi, Georgia had no chance in an unattractive match. North Macedonia should now prepare well. because the Euros will be something very different."
Darko Pancev, 1991 Golden Shoe winner

"Here we are at the Euros! This is a message for all Macedonians, Albanians and Turks that play for the national team, that our country should be protected by those who lead it. Victory for the joy of the soul. This Macedonia will live."
Toni Stojanovski, Macedonian TV journalist

Tactician... Angelovski

COACH

Igor ANGELOVSKI
Age 44 (02.06.76)
Appointed October 2015

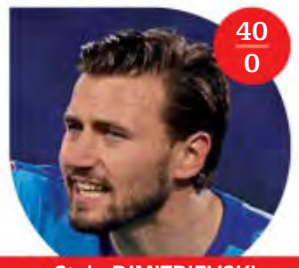
Modest with results compared to his predecessors, but he has built real chemistry in a team of players from different ethnic groups. Those same players stood behind him when the Macedonian FA extended his contract by only six months in January. They will be playing for his future as much as national pride this summer. Angelovski has also found a good blend of energy and experience; summarised by the fact that he convinced Pandev to return to international football, but also called up seven members of the Under-21 squad.

THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

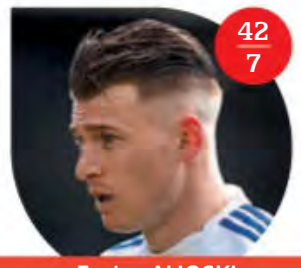
Martin BOGATINOV
Ethnikos Achna (Cyp)
Age 35 (26.04.86)
Endured a four-year absence, but his experience will be crucial. A mistake versus Croatia eight years ago saw him axed from the set-up.



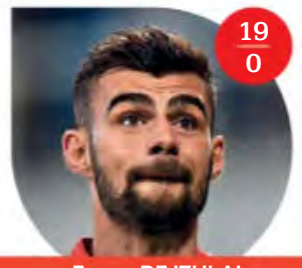
Stole DIMITRIEVSKI
Rayo Vallecano (Spa)
Age 27 (25.12.93)
Spent almost a decade in Spain, but has only played 22 times in La Liga. Good reflexes and control of the penalty area. Trusted by the coach.

Damjan SHISHKOVSKI
Doxa Katokopias (Cyp)
Age 26 (18.03.95)
Won all of his six caps last autumn when first called up. Recently moved to Cyprus after spells in Belgium and Finland. Fine handling and decisive.

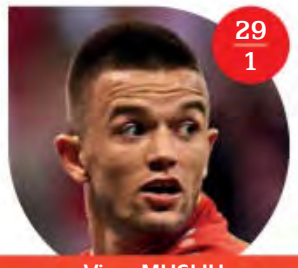
DEFENDERS



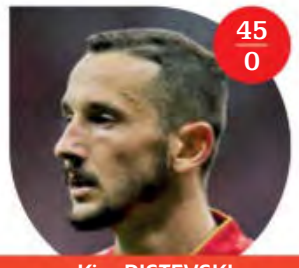
Ezgjan ALIOSKI
Leeds United (Eng)
Age 29 (12.02.92)
Multi-tasking left-back or winger, better in attack than defence. On the radar of Galatasaray after a good first season in the Premier League.



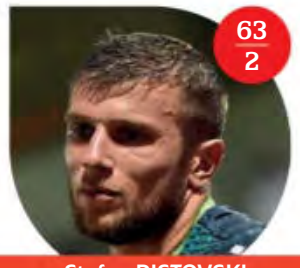
Egzon BEJTULAI
Shkendija
Age 27 (07.01.94)
Centre-back who can cover the right flank as well. Part of the U21 team that reached the Euro finals in 2017. Aggressive, a good tackler and pacy.



Visar MUSLIU
Fehervar (Hun)
Age 26 (13.11.94)
One of the rare players who have appeared for both big North Macedonian rivals Vardar and Shkendija. Centre-back with good jumping and heading.

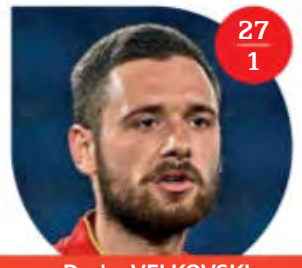


Kire RISTEVSKI
Ujpest (Hun)
Age 30 (22.10.90)
Back-up central defender, often utilised when Angelovski adopts a 3-5-2 formation. Most of his caps have been from the bench. Reliable stand-in.



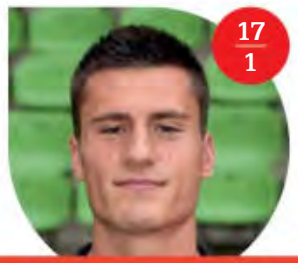
Stefan RISTOVSKI
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)
Age 29 (12.02.92)
Right wing-back, on the road again with Dinamo Zagreb after spending the first half of 2020-21 warming Sporting's bench. An accurate crosser.

Kristijan TOSHEVSKI
Tirana (Alb)
Age 27 (06.05.94)
Right-back who promised a lot as a rookie, but still needs to improve. Mostly used from the bench. Fast, decisive, good agility and excellent positioning.

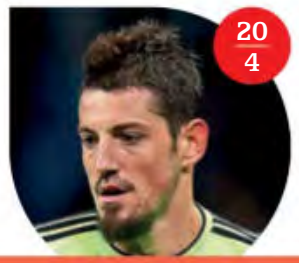


Darko VELKOVSKI
Rijeka (Cro)
Age 25 (21.06.95)
Centre-back earmarked as a future star a decade ago, but injuries stopped his progress. A good man-marker, he was originally a midfielder.

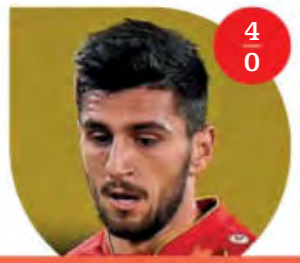
MIDFIELDERS



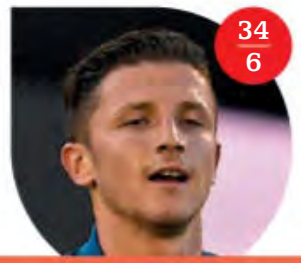
Gjoko ZAJKOV
Charleroi (Blg)
Age 26 (10.02.95)
Spare central defender and another member of the U21 team that played at the 2017 Euros. Fine acceleration, a man for special marking tasks.



Arijan ADEMI
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)
Age 29 (29.05.91)
Experienced, warrior-like box-to-box midfielder. Played for Croatia's youth teams before opting to represent the country of his grandparents.



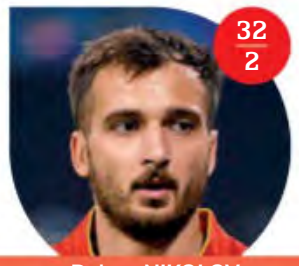
Daniel AVRAMOVSKI
Kayserispor (Tur)
Age 26 (20.02.95)
Attacking midfielder and one of the stars of North Macedonian champions Vardar last season before moving to Turkey. Strong mentally and technically.



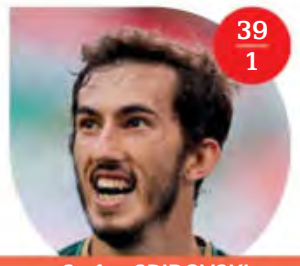
Enis BARDHI
Levante (Spa)
Age 25 (02.07.95)
Ball-playing midfielder, the highest-scoring foreigner in Levante's history and one of the best free-kick takers in La Liga. Could attract big interest.

Eljif ELMAS
Napoli (Ita)
Age 21 (24.09.99)
All-rounder with Turkish roots and the youngest Macedonian to make a famous transfer abroad. Gifted dribbler and very creative. Rumoured to be joining Benfica.

Tihomir KOSTADINOV
Ruzomberok (Svk)
Age 25 (04.03.96)
Central midfielder who rose through the youth set-up. Most of his club career has been spent in Slovakia. Tackling is his main attribute.

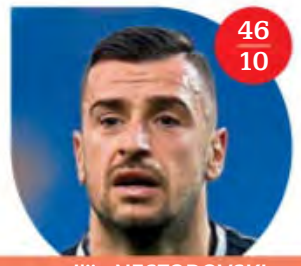


Boban NIKOLOV
Lecce (Ita)
Age 26 (28.07.94)
Defensive midfielder who can also play as a right wing-back in a 3-5-2. Never surrenders, aggressive, brave and has bags of stamina.

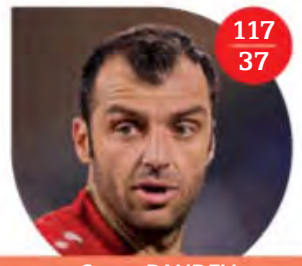


Stefan SPIROVSKI
AEK Larnaca (Cyp)
Age 30 (23.08.90)
Spare hard-working and quick attacking midfielder. Respected by domestic media and coaches. Cyprus is his fifth country of destination outside Macedonia.

FORWARDS

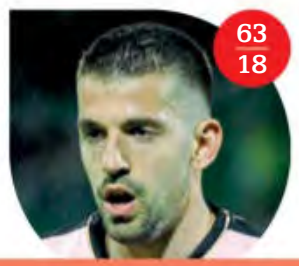


Ilija NESTOROVSKI
Udinese (Ita)
Age 31 (12.03.90)
Classic No.9. Sent home after a controversial celebration against Liechtenstein in March, but retains the coach's trust. Strong in the air.

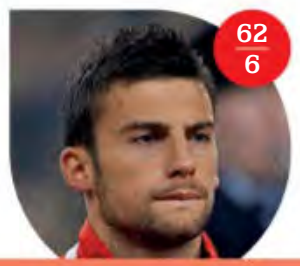


Goran PANDEV
Genoa (Ita)
Age 37 (27.07.83)
Creative attacking midfielder-cum-forward, motivational leader, and all-time top scorer and appearance maker. Hit the goal that sealed qualification.

Vlatko STOJANOVSKI
Chambly (Fra)
Age 24 (23.04.97)
Powerful striker with good aerial ability, on loan in Ligue 2 from Nimes. Has made a good early impression on the international stage despite limited minutes.



Aleksandar TRAJKOVSKI
Mallorca (Spa)
Age 28 (05.09.92)
Back-up striker. One of the best scorers in North Macedonia's history and on target three times in March's World Cup qualifiers. Good shooting and pace.



Ivan TRICHKOVSKI
AEK Larnaca (Cyp)
Age 34 (18.04.87)
Winger-cum-striker. One of the best scorers in the Cypriot top flight with Champions League experience. Getting on but still has something to offer.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Risto JANKOV (Rabotnicki)
DEFENDERS Stefan ASHKOVSKI (Botosani, Rou), Tome KITANOVSKI (Makedonija GP), Mario MLADENOVSKI (Botev, Bul)
MIDFIELDERS Ferhan HASANI (Partizani, Alb), Agim IBRAIMI (Kukesi, Alb), Marjan RADESKI (Akademija Pandev), Milan RISTOVSKI (Spartak Trnava, Svk), Ennur TOTRE (Shkendija)
FORWARDS Ljupcho DORIEV (Shkendija), Krste VELKOSKI (Sarajevo, BiH)

More questions than answers

Not an easy job for new coach Paulo Sousa

In January, president of the Polish FA, Zbigniew Boniek, surprisingly sacked national team coach Jerzy Brzeczek, despite having strongly supported him just two months earlier. The coach had successfully guided Poland to qualification for Euro 2020 and helped them avoid relegation from the highest division of the Nations League – but for Polish legend Boniek, that wasn't enough.

The team had come under heavy criticism from both the media and the fans – not for poor results, but for their unattractive style of play. However, more importantly, Brzeczek had a strained relationship with star striker Robert Lewandowski. The media had picked up on this fact, and soon came to the conclusion that the players were not playing for their coach.

The Portuguese Paulo Sousa was quickly unveiled as the replacement. After a short honeymoon period, he soon realised that his new job would not be so easy – and not just because of having no previous experience as an international coach. When he named his first squad for the 2022 World Cup qualifiers in March, he was criticised for having "no realistic view of Polish football". He failed to call up players (defender Tomasz Kedziora from Dynamo Kiev and midfielder Bartosz Kapustka from Legia Warsaw) who, according to the media, should have been involved with the team. In contrast he called up seven debutants.

Criticism increased after the first away match against Hungary, when Sousa decided to keep their most experienced central defender Kamil Glik on the bench. When the hosts went ahead 2-0 in the second half, Sousa made three substitutions, among them Glik, and fortunately the game was rescued with a 3-3 draw. His decision was later described as "admitting he was wrong".

He was hammered again by sections of the media and local pundits in the next game, when Robert Lewandowski injured his knee against Andorra, forcing him out of action for a month and the third qualifier against England. Sousa's decision to play him as a starter against the minnows was viewed as "highly irresponsible".

Without Lewandowski, Poland lost 2-1, which should not come as a surprise for a team that have never beaten England away, and last drew at Wembley in 1973.

After those three March games with a new coach at the helm, it is extremely difficult to say what Poland can achieve at Euro 2020. Sousa's relationship with his players appears to be better than his predecessor, but will that be enough to produce better results on the pitch?

Dariusz Kurowski

Experienced... Juventus goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny

> It is extremely difficult to say what Poland can achieve at Euro 2020

PAULO SOUSA

How do you reflect on March's 3-3 World Cup qualifying draw with Hungary, your first match in charge of Poland?
I am very proud and I think that most Poles should be proud as well. We were the team that really wanted to win, we changed the rhythm of the game, played aggressively. Step by step, we played faster and faster. We started to understand a few things, we had fantastic belief to come from behind twice, which the players did not do earlier. This was thanks to our mentality.

Your appointment has received some criticism. How do you respond to that and does that affect your confidence?
I strongly believe in myself, in my convictions, the way I watch the game, and in my coaching staff. I believe in our federation and, most importantly, in my players. If you want to win games, you need quality. Polish players have it. Now they have to transform it from their clubs to the national team. And my role is helping them to do that.

Poland conceded five goals in three games in March's qualifiers. How do you intend to improve the team's defence?

Premature...Jakub Moder celebrates scoring Poland's equaliser in their defeat against England in March

I know that one of the biggest challenges for me will be working on the organisation of the team's defence. I want the players to show the same aggression as they do in attack. We have many elements to work on, especially in two areas – going from attack into defence and playing in defence. It will be a key, decisive element for our future.

You have two outstanding goalkeepers in Juventus' Wojciech Szczesny and West Ham's Lukasz Fabianski. How difficult will it be to choose between them?
I underlined from the beginning that a goalkeeper needs stability. So I decided that our No.1 would be Wojciech Szczesny. But football changes rapidly, there are many injuries and suspensions, so all of the goalkeepers, especially Lukasz Fabianski, who is on the same level, should be ready at any moment. Generally, I am very happy about players I have in this position.

How important is Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski to your team?
I wanted to find in his eyes the passion and commitment, and I found it immediately. He is not only the best player in the world, but a real leader of the national team. He's an excellent example for the others. A player who works hard and motivates his team-mates to develop themselves. The national team is a special kind of team, and thanks to that you can show your respect and love for your country. So I'm very happy that I found this flare in Robert's eyes.

Polish FA (PZPN)

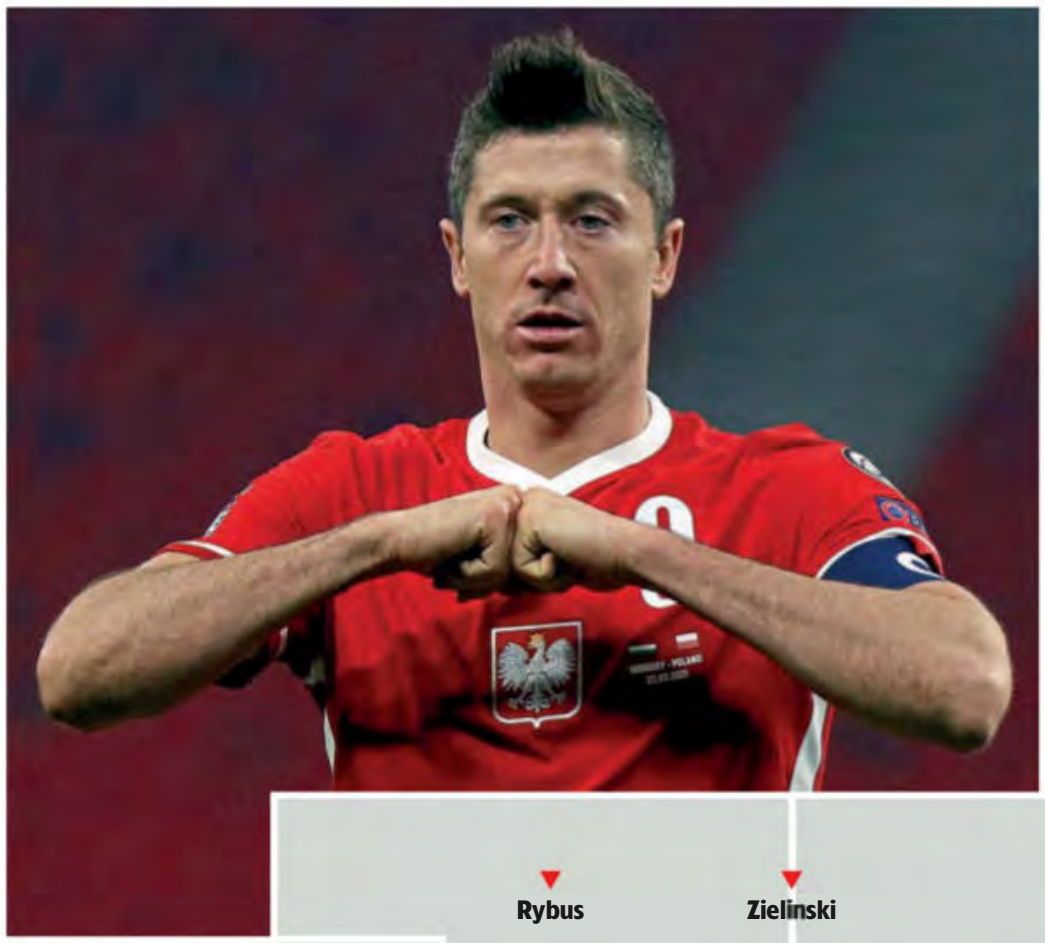
Challenge...This is Sousa's first experience as a national team coach

TACTICS

Supplying Lewandowski

Paulo Sousa has underlined that Poland's biggest advantage is in attack with Robert Lewandowski in a starring role. Everything the team does revolves around supplying him with chances. He wants his players to keep the ball as much as possible, to dominate opponents and create more scoring opportunities than them. When the team loses the ball, the players must try to recover it as quickly as possible high up the pitch. He looks for players who are able to read the game and anticipate potential opportunities, and those who are fast enough to cover empty spaces on the pitch.

Sousa also emphasises that his playing system is a "static theory" and, as games develop, he likes to change the system. He prefers playing with three defenders, but in an asymmetric way. The starting formation has four defensive players in a 4-4-2, but the left-back plays high when the team has the ball, with left-sided midfielder Piotr Zielinski moving further forward as a playmaker, thereby turning the formation into a 3-5-2. However, in March's World Cup qualifiers Sousa changed the system in the second halves, introducing a 3-4-3 and, against England, he played 5-3-2 from the start.



Leader...Poland are heavily reliant on Robert Lewandowski

Dangerous... Kamil Jozwiak against Andorra

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 1
v **Russia**
(h, Wroclaw)
Jun 8
v **Iceland**
(h, Poznan)

Veteran...Kamil Glik against England

GROUP GAMES
Jun 14
v **Slovakia**
(Dublin)
Jun 19
v **Spain**
(Bilbao)
Jun 23
v **Sweden**
(Dublin)

THE VIEW FROM POLAND

"It is difficult to notice real progress with the Polish national team. To be honest, I am not really surprised, because I know how modest our potential is with the exception of Robert Lewandowski. If Paulo Sousa's team can get to the knockout stages of Euro 2020, it would be a great success."

Wladyslaw Zmuda, former international

"If Poland only played second halves, we could have a chance. In the World Cup qualifiers, Sousa showed he reacts well. But in each game we lost something – against Hungary two points, against Andorra Lewandowski, and versus England the illusion we can win at Wembley."

Zbigniew Mucha, Pilka Nozna

Successful... Sousa

COACH

Paulo SOUSA (Por)
Age 50 (30.08.70)
Appointed January 2021

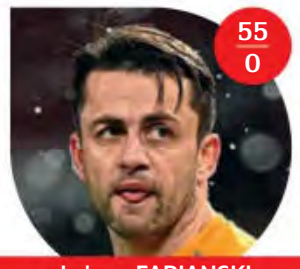
Former Portugal defensive midfielder who became a FIFA Under-20 world champion in 1989, took part in Euro '96 and Euro 2000, and the World Cup in 2002. Won many trophies, among them the Champions League with Juventus in 1996 and Borussia Dortmund in 1997.

As a coach, he has worked with a number of clubs in England, Hungary, Israel, Switzerland, Italy, China and France, winning two domestic titles (Maccabi Tel Aviv in 2013-14 and Basle in 2014-15). His appointment as Poland coach is his first national team role.

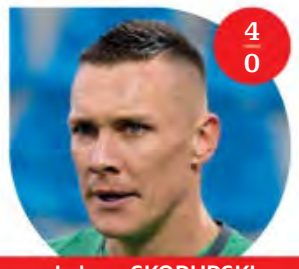
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

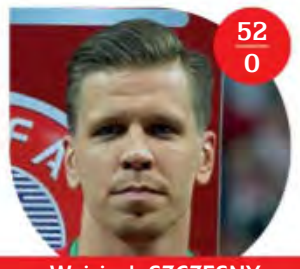
GOALKEEPERS


55 / 0

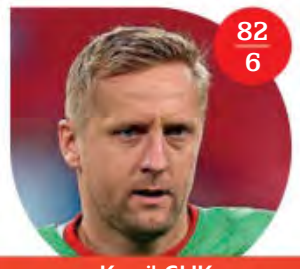
Lukasz FABIANSKI
West Ham United (Eng)
Age 36 (18.04.85)
Established himself at Legia Warsaw before joining Arsenal in 2007. Made the Poland squad at two World Cups and two Euros.


4 / 0

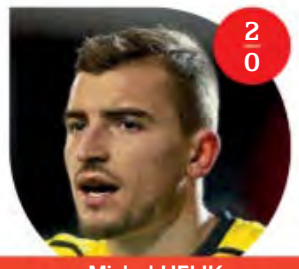
Lukasz SKORUPSKI
Bologna (Ita)
Age 30 (05.05.91)
Third-choice keeper for years. Promising displays with Gornik Zabrze earned him a move to Italy where he's played for Roma, Empoli and Bologna.


52 / 0

Wojciech SZCZESNY
Juventus (Ita)
Age 31 (18.04.90)
Joined Arsenal aged 16, then played for Roma before replacing Gianluigi Buffon at Juventus. Son of Maciej, the former Poland goalkeeper.


82 / 6

Kamil GLIK
Benevento (Ita)
Age 33 (03.02.88)
Experienced centre-back, the heart of Poland's defence, powerful in the air and vice-captain. Once in Real Madrid's reserves.

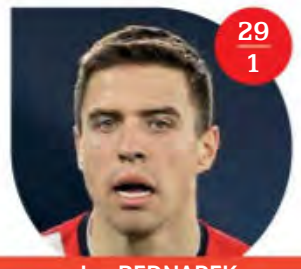

2 / 0

Michal HELIK
Barnsley (Eng)
Age 25 (09.09.95)
Centre-back who made his debut in the 3-3 draw with Hungary. Joined Barnsley in the English Championship last September.

21 / 0

Tomasz KEDZIORA
Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
Age 26 (11.06.94)
Grew up and won the Polish championship with Lech Poznan. His performances in Ukraine saw him become the regular right-back under Brzeczek.

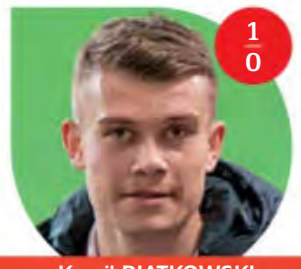
DEFENDERS


29 / 1

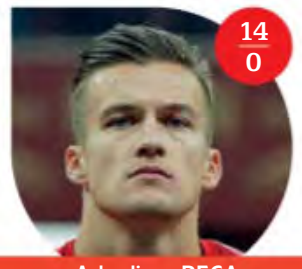
Jan BEDNAREK
Southampton (Eng)
Age 25 (12.04.96)
Physically strong centre-back, a product of Lech Poznan's academy. Scored for Poland against Japan in their farewell victory at World Cup 2018.

31 / 0

Bartosz BERESZYNSKI
Sampdoria (Ita)
Age 28 (12.07.92)
Right-back who began his career in Lech Poznan, where his father Przemyslaw won three titles in the 1990s. Has settled well in Italy since 2017.


1 / 0

Kamil PIATKOWSKI
Rakow Czestochowa
Age 20 (21.06.00)
Centre-back or right-back. One of the best players at Rakow Czestochowa, this season's Ekstraklasa revelations. Joining RB Salzburg this summer.

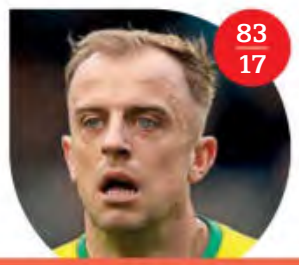

14 / 0

Arkadiusz RECA
Crotone (Ita)
Age 25 (17.06.95)
Rapid left-back who can play left-wing. Called up for the first time in 2018 by his former Wisla Plock coach Brzeczek. On loan at Crotone from Atalanta.

MIDFIELDERS

61 / 2

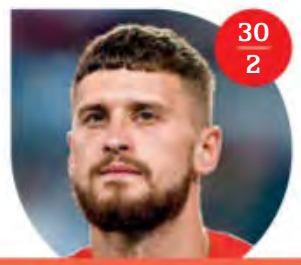
Maciej RYBUS
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)
Age 31 (19.08.89)
Quick and dynamic left-back. Missed Euro 2016 with a broken shoulder. Spent 2016-17 at Lyon after leaving Terek Grozny, before returning to Russia in 2017.


83 / 17

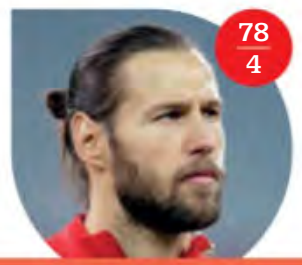
Kamil GROSICKI
West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
Age 32 (08.06.88)
Experienced winger, who causes problems by running from deep and dancing with the ball out wide. Barely played for his club this season.

12 / 2

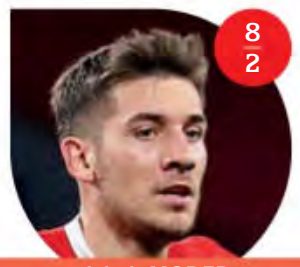
Kamil JOZWIAK
Derby County (Eng)
Age 23 (22.04.98)
Right-midfielder, a product of the Lech Poznan academy, who delivers precise crosses and set-pieces. Played for Poland at all levels from Under-16s.


30 / 2

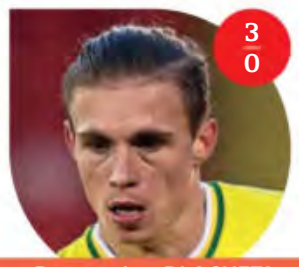
Mateusz KLICH
Leeds United (Eng)
Age 30 (13.06.90)
Versatile midfielder, works hard and creates opportunities with his precise passes. Played in Germany and the Netherlands before moving to Leeds.


78 / 4

Grzegorz KRYCHOWIAK
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)
Age 31 (29.01.90)
Experienced and physical defensive midfielder. Won two Europa Leagues with Sevilla, but now rebuilding in Russia after a disappointing period at PSG.


8 / 2

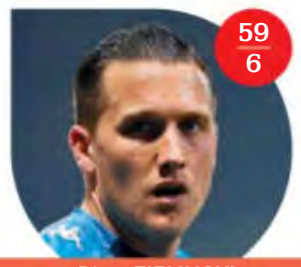
Jakub MODER
Brighton & Hove Albion (Eng)
Age 22 (07.04.99)
Another Lech Poznan academy product. Intelligent midfielder who has good movement, plays unconventional passes and likes to shoot from distance.


3 / 0

Przemyslaw PLACHETA
Norwich City (Eng)
Age 23 (23.03.98)
Speedy left-winger who joined RB Leipzig as a teenager but failed to make the grade. His older brother Marcin is a former Winter Olympian.

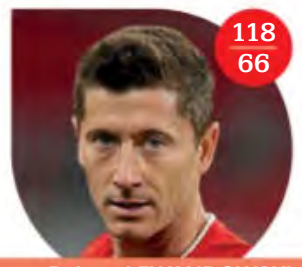
11 / 1

Sebastian SZYMANSKI
Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
Age 22 (10.05.99)
Promising creative midfielder with good technical skills and excellent vision. Was cut from the 35-man provisional squad for Russia 2018.

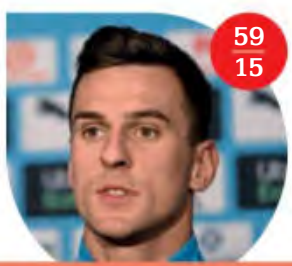

59 / 6

Piotr ZIELINSKI
Napoli (Ita)
Age 26 (20.05.94)
Skilful playmaker, who is yet to produce his best for Poland. Moved to Udinese as a teenager and has spent his entire senior club career in Italy.

FORWARDS


118 / 66

Robert LEWANDOWSKI
Bayern Munich (Ger)
Age 32 (21.08.88)
Goal machine extraordinaire. Centre-forward who scores all types of goals. Poland's all-time top scorer and appearance maker.


59 / 15

Arkadiusz MILIK
Marseille (Fra)
Age 27 (28.02.94)
Left-footed forward or offensive midfielder. Made his name with Ajax, then Napoli, and now on loan at Marseille. Participated at Euro 2016 and World Cup 2018.

18 / 8

Krzysztof PIATEK
Hertha Berlin (Ger)
Age 25 (01.07.95)
Typical finisher. Sensational in Serie A during 2018-19, scoring 13 goals in 19 games for Genoa resulting in a move to Milan. Now rediscovering his form.

2 / 1

Karol SWIDERSKI
Age 24 (23.01.97)
PAOK (Gre)
One of Paulo Sousa's new caps, the centre-forward scored on his debut as a substitute against Andorra in March. Moved to Greece in 2019.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Bartlomiej DRAGOWSKI (Fiorentina, Ita), Karol NIEMCZYCKI (Cracovia)
DEFENDERS Pawel DAWIDOWICZ (Verona, Ita), Michal KARBOWNIK (Brighton & Hove Albion, Eng), Tymoteusz PUCHACZ (Lech Poznan), Sebastian WALUKIEWICZ (Cagliari, Ita)
MIDFIELDERS Rafal AUGUSTYNIAK (Ural Yekaterinburg, Rus), Bartosz KAPUSTKA (Legia Warsaw), Sebastian KOWALCZYK (Pogon Szczecin), Kacper KOZLOWSKI (Pogon Szczecin), Karol LINETTY (Torino, Ita), Bartosz SLISZ (Legia Warsaw)
FORWARDS Dawid KOWNACKI (Fortuna Dusseldorf, Ger)

Different squad, same ambition

Reigning champions hoping for repeat success

Man-for-man, Portugal have a better and deeper squad than when lifting their maiden major trophy in Paris five years ago. For the reigning champions to repeat their Euro 2016 success, however, coach Fernando Santos has to mould a fabulous array of talent into a balanced and cohesive unit. Now seven years at the helm, the veteran coach still often appears to be waging an internal tug-of-war between his naturally conservative football philosophy and the temptation to go for a more expansive style of play.

With the attacking firepower provided by the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Joao Felix, Bernardo Silva, Diogo Jota and Bruno Fernandes – all key players at a handful of Europe's biggest clubs – it is not surprising that, despite largely positive results, Santos continues to draw criticism for "not letting off the handbrake".

Sporadic examples of a more offensive approach, such as when crushing Croatia and Sweden in Lisbon during the Nations League, have been tempered by irritation shown by Santos when he feels his team is too open.

> Being drawn in one of the Euros' deadliest-ever "groups of death" has not dampened optimism regarding the team's chances

After rounding off the Nations League campaign with victory versus Croatia in Split, the 66-year-old was visibly frustrated after Portugal had dropped the defensive intensity that has characterised the team under his watch. "You don't win these games by playing nice, pretty football. Doing that, nobody would beat anybody. Playing like that, we'll find it difficult to be ourselves."

The outburst was a timely reminder that for Santos the recipe for winning in international football is controlling and grinding down the opposition, rather than attempting to outscore them in a free-for-all. And with an outstanding record – just four defeats in 56 competitive matches – and two trophies in the cabinet, who can blame him for sticking to his principles.

Influential... Bruno Fernandes

It is a measure of the strides that Portugal have taken over the last two decades, and especially under Santos, that being drawn in one of the Euros' deadliest-ever "groups of death" has not dampened optimism regarding the team's chances of enjoying another memorable tournament. The *Selecao* face a resurgent Hungary in Budapest, then Germany in Munich, then world champions France back in Budapest.

Cristiano Ronaldo's ambition remains undimmed, and alongside arguably his best-ever supporting cast, the captain will be gunning to help Portugal embellish the most golden era in their history with another trophy.

But he also has individual records in his sight. A single win this summer would move him above Spain's Cesc Fabregas and Andres Iniesta for the most games won in the competition, while a single goal would see him become the tournament's outright top goalscorer, overtaking legendary France player Michel Platini.

Tom Kundert

FERNANDO SANTOS

Portugal have been drawn alongside world champions France, Germany and Hungary. What do you make of this year's "group of death"?
Nobody wanted Germany and France in their group, and neither did Portugal. But Germany or France didn't want [to be drawn against] Portugal either. We will prepare well for the tournament. Let's see what happens.

How difficult has it been getting ready for the tournament with COVID-19

Out...Pedro Neto, who will sadly miss the finals with injury, celebrates with Joao Cancelo and Ronaldo

severely affecting preparations?
Often one of the problems is we want to change the world, but we forget that to change the world we have to change ourselves. We can't wait for others to solve our problems. Portugal managed to become champions of Europe against all expectations, so we can get over this too. Portuguese people are capable.
With a certain amount of trauma?
Yes, but we will overcome it.

How crucial will your captain Cristiano Ronaldo be to Portugal's chances of success this summer, especially as he chases some individual records?
Cristiano Ronaldo is always super motivated. It doesn't matter if he has scored more or fewer goals lately [for his club]. He always has extra motivation when he plays for his country. I hope, and I am absolutely convinced, he will have the same ambition as he has always shown for Portugal, not thinking about personal objectives but instead focusing completely on the objectives of the national team.

And do you think that your longevity as coach, being in charge for almost seven years, has affected your hunger in any way?
It's a great privilege for me and my coaching team to serve Portugal and Portuguese football. We will always have a single ambition, which is to win. We know that we are not going to win everything, but we will fight to win everything. Since I have been Portugal coach that is the target we set ourselves.
Tom Kundert

Euphoric...Santos celebrates winning Euro 2016 with Cristiano Ronaldo

TACTICS

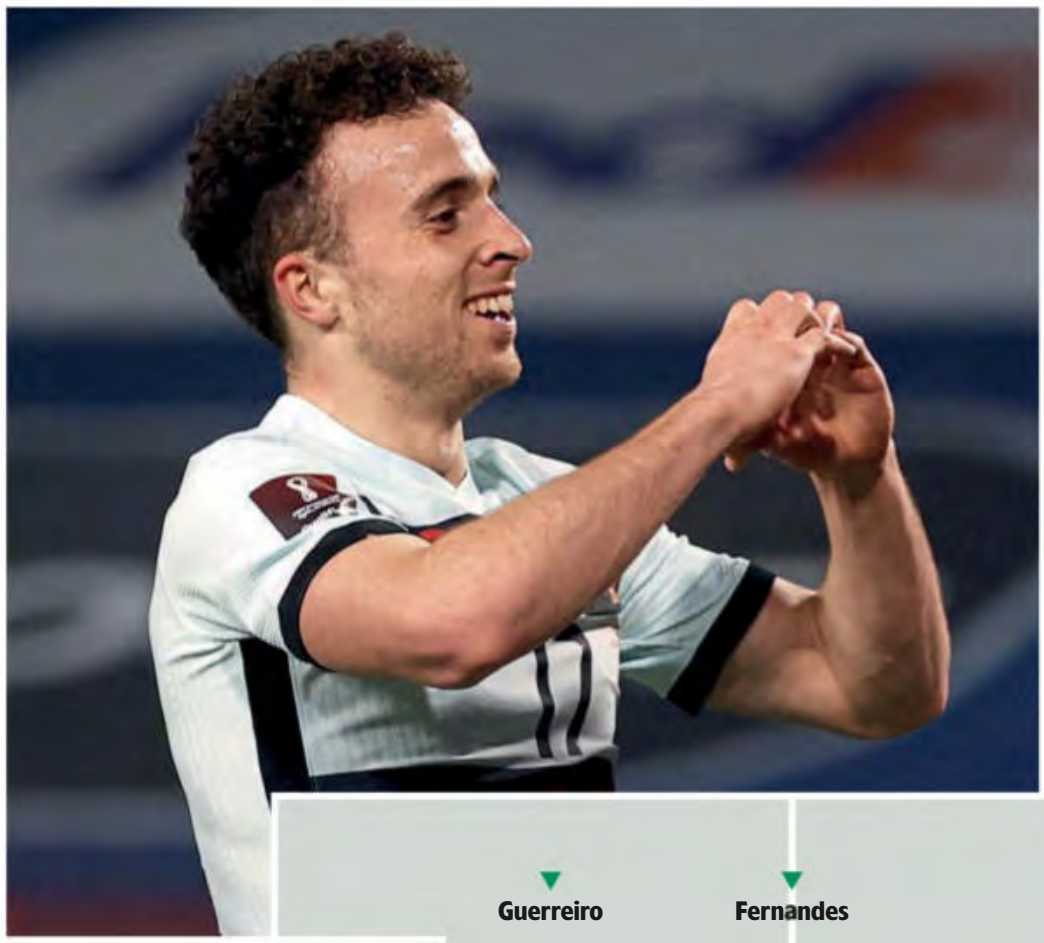
Resisting the temptation

Portugal won Euro 2016 playing a narrow 4-4-2, ostensibly with four central midfielders across the pitch, and that has remained Fernando Santos' go-to formation for the majority of his reign as *Selecao* coach.

However, the emergence of a plethora of attacking talent and the fact Portugal have an array of top-quality full-backs with a propensity to push forward has led to calls for a change in approach. The personnel available suggests a change to some form of 3-4-3 could be an exciting route worth pursuing, but Santos will not make such a radical tactical switch so close to a major tournament, especially given Portugal's paucity of centre-back options.

Santos has dabbled with 4-3-3, employing a double pivot in midfield to get four attacking options on the pitch. With Ronaldo spearheading Portugal's attack, one of Bruno Fernandes, Bernardo Silva, Joao Felix and Diogo Jota will have to settle for the bench, and that's even before factoring in striker Andre Silva – who's enjoyed a fabulous club season – while Pedro Neto will be sorely missed after his season-ending knee injury.

Despite the myriad of possibilities, expect Santos to go with his tried and trusted 4-4-2 this summer.



Impact...Diogo Jota is fighting for a place in the starting line-up

Talisman...Portugal are now less reliant on Cristiano Ronaldo

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 4
v **Spain**
(a, Seville)
Jun 9
v **Israel**
(h, Venue TBC)

Competition...Felix may have to settle for a place on the bench

GROUP GAMES
Jun 15
v **Hungary**
(Budapest)
Jun 19
v **Germany**
(Munich)
Jun 23
v **France**
(Budapest)

THE VIEW FROM PORTUGAL

"Portugal went into past tournaments dreaming of winning them, but it was only a dream, more a hope than reality. Nowadays, with the players we have and with two titles won under Fernando Santos, the mentality is different. We really believe we can win."

Domingos Paciencia, ex-Porto and Portugal striker

"Will Portugal win the Euros? Nobody knows, but one thing is certain – they have the quality to win the tournament. They are a team that are recognised as one of the best in world football, they are reigning champions, so for sure Portugal will be strong contenders."

Antonio Veloso, ex-Portugal defender

Conservative... Fernando Santos

COACH

Fernando SANTOS
Age 66 (10.10.54)
Appointed September 2014

Fernando Santos is made to manage in international football. He achieved some success at club level, notably at Porto, but it was as coach of Greece that he found his vocation. He got the Greeks to Euro 2012 and then made history by qualifying them for World Cup 2014 and guiding them to the knockout stages for the first time. He has proven a perfect fit with Portugal too, leading the country to Euro 2016 glory, winning the inaugural Nations League and continuing to register impressive results and hold the utmost respect among all the players.

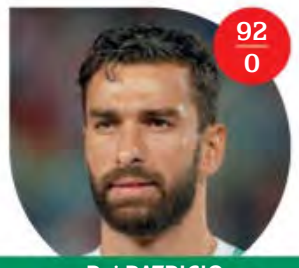
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

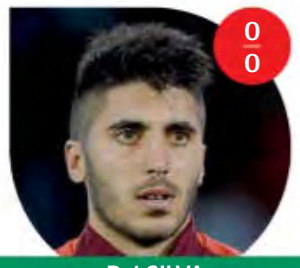
GOALKEEPERS

13 / 0

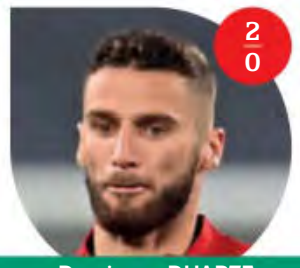
Anthony LOPES
Lyon (Fra)
Age 30 (01.10.90)
The Lyon No.1 has at last had a few opportunities recently, starting all three World Cup qualifiers in March, and has proven a capable deputy.


92 / 0

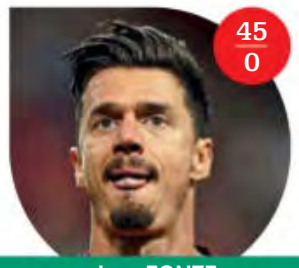
Rui PATRICIO
Wolverhampton Wanderers (Eng)
Age 33 (15.02.88)
Portugal's record appearance holder for a goalkeeper, nearing the 100-club, the Wolves shot-stopper is untouchable between the sticks.


0 / 0

Rui SILVA
Granada (Spa)
Age 27 (07.02.94)
One of the best goalkeepers in Spain in recent seasons, the 27-year-old offers solid back-up behind Lopes and Rui Patricio.


2 / 0

Domingos DUARTE
Granada (Spa)
Age 26 (10.03.95)
A late bloomer, centre-back Duarte has played his part in turning modest Granada into overachievers in La Liga. Made his Portugal debut in November.

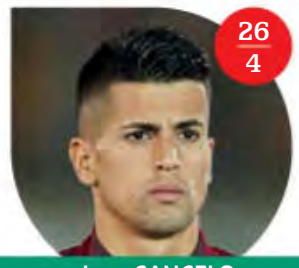

45 / 0

Jose FONTE
Lille (Fra)
Age 37 (22.12.83)
Age is just a number, with the centre-back enjoying another super season as captain of Lille. Formerly of West Ham United, Southampton and Crystal Palace.

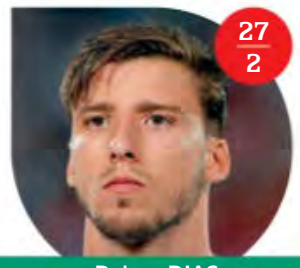
45 / 2

Raphael GUERREIRO
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Age 27 (22.12.93)
One of Portugal's Euro 2016 heroes, the left-back is a key attacking component. French-born, he's never played club football in Portugal.

DEFENDERS


26 / 4

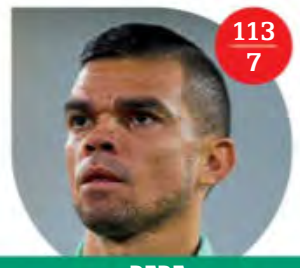
Joao CANCELO
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 26 (27.05.94)
His CV includes Benfica, Valencia, Internazionale and Juventus, but it is in England where the versatile full-back has truly blossomed.


27 / 2

Ruben DIAS
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 24 (14.05.97)
Credited with transforming Manchester City's defence, the former Benfica centre-back is at the peak of his game and will provide calmness and security.

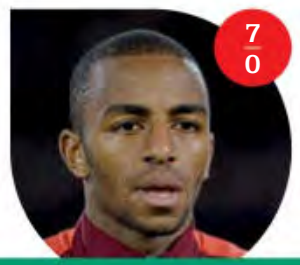
3 / 0

Nuno MENDES
Sporting
Age 18 (19.06.02)
An incredible breakout season at Sporting as a left wing-back has many of Europe's biggest clubs chasing his signature. The Euros could be his shop window.

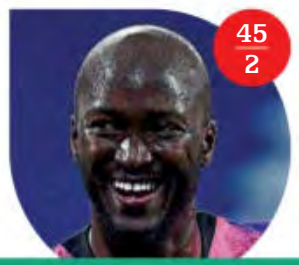

113 / 7

PEPE
Porto
Age 38 (26.02.83)
A magnificent performance to help Porto knock Juventus out of the Champions League showed that, at 38, Pepe remains one of the best.

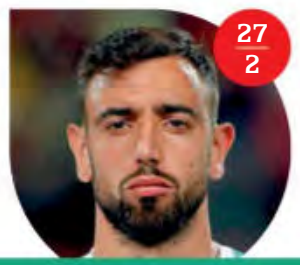
MIDFIELDERS


7 / 0

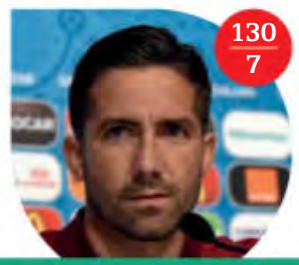
Ricardo PEREIRA
Leicester City (Eng)
Age 27 (06.10.93)
A beneficiary of Euro 2020's one-year postponement, the attacking right-back has fought his way back from an ACL injury and is now finding form.


45 / 2

DANILO Pereira
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Age 29 (09.09.91)
Finally got his big move, joining PSG last October, and he has not looked out of place amidst the constellation of stars in Paris. Dependable.


27 / 2

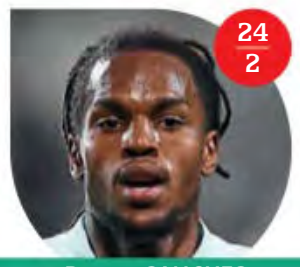
Bruno FERNANDES
Manchester United (Eng)
Age 26 (08.09.94)
Has made a thunderous impact at Manchester United with his goal and assist contributions, but he is yet to fully hit his stride for Portugal.


130 / 7

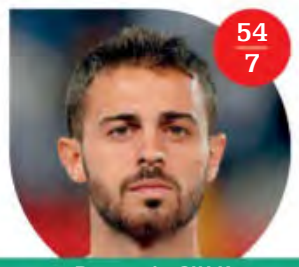
Joao MOUTINHO
Wolverhampton Wanderers (Eng)
Age 34 (08.09.86)
Only Cristiano Ronaldo has more Portugal caps than Moutinho and the classy midfield dynamo still has plenty to offer, even if that means as a substitute.

3 / 1

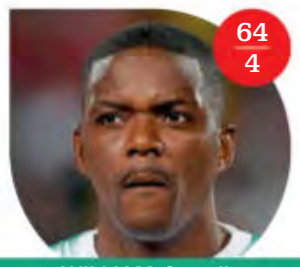
Joao PALHINHA
Sporting
Age 25 (09.07.95)
Superb season at Sporting has thrust the dynamic and aggressive holding midfielder into the national team picture. Scored in his third appearance.


24 / 2

Renato SANCHES
Lille (Fra)
Age 23 (18.08.97)
The energetic midfielder is back showing the form that made him one of Europe's hottest prospects and Young Player of the Tournament at Euro 2016.

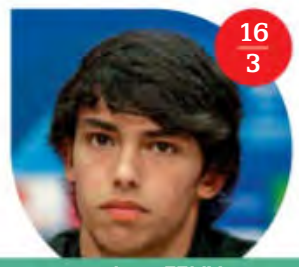

54 / 7

Bernardo SILVA
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 26 (10.08.94)
A wondrous left foot, allying industry and creativity, and again thriving at Manchester City. One of four players to start all eight Euro 2020 qualifiers.

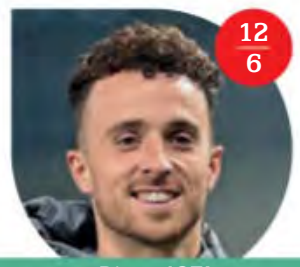

64 / 4

WILLIAM Carvalho
Real Betis (Spa)
Age 29 (07.04.92)
A wonderful passing range and tactically astute, William has had an injury-affected season, but he remains a Santos favourite and should make the squad.

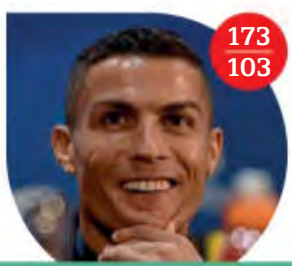
FORWARDS


16 / 3

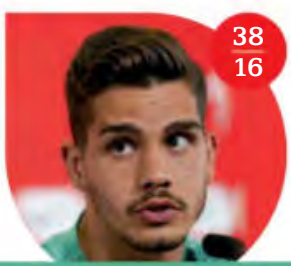
Joao FELIX
Atletico Madrid (Spa)
Age 21 (10.11.99)
Coming off a much more productive second season in Spain. Silky touch, imagination and vision, Felix is destined for a fabulous career.


12 / 6

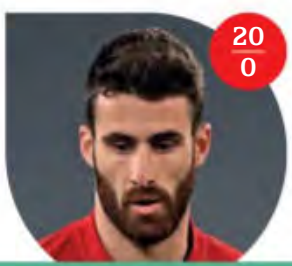
Diogo JOTA
Liverpool (Eng)
Age 24 (04.12.96)
Pacy, direct and hard-running forward, Jota took his game up a level in 2020-21, both at Liverpool and for Portugal. Has a knack for scoring decisive goals.


173 / 103

Cristiano RONALDO
Juventus (Ita)
Age 36 (05.02.85)
Has obliterated every record for Portugal, but wants to add to his legacy by becoming only the second captain to lift consecutive Euros trophies.


38 / 16

Andre SILVA
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
Age 25 (06.11.95)
The striker has had a prolific season for Eintracht Frankfurt and will be hoping to rekindle a partnership with Ronaldo that has been auspicious in the past.


20 / 0

Rafa SILVA
Benfica
Age 27 (17.05.93)
Rapid dribbler, one of Benfica's most dangerous attackers for years. Likely to make the squad in Pedro Neto's absence. Could be Portugal's secret weapon.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Jose SA (Olympiakos, Gre)
DEFENDERS CEDRIC Soares (Arsenal, Eng), Luis NETO (Sporting), Mario RUI (Napoli, Ita), Nelson SEMEDO (Wolverhampton Wanderers, Eng), Ruben SEMEDO (Olympiakos, Gre)
MIDFIELDERS Andre GOMES (Everton, Eng), Ruben NEVES (Wolverhampton Wanderers, Eng), Sergio OLIVEIRA (Porto)
FORWARDS Goncalo GUEDES (Valencia, Spa), Rafael LEAO (Milan, Ita), Pedro NETO (Wolverhampton Wanderers, Eng) *injured*, PAULINHO (Sporting), Daniel PODENCE (Wolverhampton Wanderers, Eng), POTE (Sporting), Francisco TRINCAO (Barcelona, Spa)

Recreating Russian World Cup magic

But will they have the "Foot of God" this time?

The goalkeeper factor, which took Russia to the 2018 World Cup quarter-finals, may not work this time. Igor Akinfeev, who made the "Foot of God" save in the penalty shootout victory against Spain in Moscow, won't be in the Euros squad.

None of the current candidates have effectively replaced the 35-year-old, who retired from national team duty in 2018 after a 15-year career. Attempts to bring him back have so far yielded no result.

If Akinfeev did return, he'd also be a candidate for the captaincy. The squad's charismatic leader, Artem Dzyuba, was stripped of it after an explicit video leaked onto social media last year. The story shocked the 32-year-old's fans who admired his passion and iconic "army salute" celebration which made "Dzyubinho" the country's hero in 2018. Following the scandal, coach Stanislav Cherchesov left the striker out of the squad for the last three games of 2020.

Dzyuba returned for March's World Cup qualifiers – scoring three times to move within one goal of Aleksandr Kerzhakov's all-time national scoring record – and eventually got the armband back from defender Georgi Dzhikiya too.

"Foot of God"... Akinfeev's save has become part of Russian football folklore

> Recent failures in European club competitions make local fans extremely sceptical about the national team's chances

Coming from a Georgian family, which fled from the war to Moscow, Dzhikiya is the only sure choice at the back with Brazilian-born Mario Fernandes. Highly efficient on the right flank, "Super Mario" gave Russia hope in the 2018 World Cup quarter-final v Croatia after scoring an extra-time equaliser, and struck two goals in the recent World Cup qualifiers too.

Outside of them there is an evident shortage of reliable defenders, which is Cherchesov's biggest headache. His final list may change with standby players called in at the very last moment.

The situation is different in midfield, where Russia even have a couple of foreign-based players, a rarity these days. The Miranchuk brothers, Aleksandr Golovin and Dmitri Barinov represent the new generation and can all make a difference if fit for the tournament.

On June 12 in St. Petersburg, Russia will face the world's top team, Belgium, for the fourth time under Cherchesov. Games against Finland and Denmark offer more hope, but there will certainly be no room for complacency. Recent failures in European club competitions make local fans extremely sceptical about the national team's chances. They still retain hope, however, that Akinfeev will make a U-turn and return for one final tournament.

Victor Gusev

STANISLAV CHERCHESOV

How difficult will it be to plunge into a new tournament after the 2018 World Cup, which brought Russia such unexpected success?
Well, our supporters helped us a lot then, and we are playing the first two games of the European Championship at home again. However, after all the praise we got, criticism followed immediately when we were not so good last autumn. And the 5-0 Nations League defeat to Serbia showed we must try to regain the winning spirit and fit new players into our scheme.

You reached the World Cup quarter-finals in your first major tournament as coach. What would be a good result for you this time around?
We want to win the tournament. It is the only task any true sportsman puts in front of themself. I said it to my players before the World Cup and will repeat it to them now. But saying we "must" be on the very top would sound strange because we are not Germany, Spain or France. We "want" to win the European Championship, like, say, the Turks or the Danes want to win it.

You left Artem Dzyuba – your captain, main goalscorer and talisman – out of

Centre of attention... Dzyuba celebrates scoring against Spain at World Cup 2018

the squad for non-playing reasons last year. Can you explain why?
The situation was morally difficult for him, so we gave him a pause until the end of 2020. I also did not want the scandal to influence the atmosphere around the team. But I said from the very start that he would return in March for the World Cup qualifiers. And as captain.

Not long ago, you called Brazilian-born Guilherme Russia's No.1 goalkeeper after Igor Akinfeev – but now he doesn't even make your squad as number two or three. Why?
The reason he was omitted is not only because of the 5-0 defeat to Serbia last November. He had a bad spell in the Russian Premier League and the Champions League [with Lokomotiv Moscow]. But we still have trust in him. And he still has a chance.

What is your opinion of Russia's group-stage draw, having to face Belgium yet again, along with Denmark and Finland?
It's not an easy one, for sure. Belgium have the top squad, and not just in our group. We know them better than the two other opponents. Denmark are very strong and lucky to play all three of their group games at home. Our last group match in Copenhagen will be a really hard test. Finland, with a number of players now based abroad, demonstrated a quality game and confidently qualified for the finals. They will be very tough rivals too.

Victor Gusev

Discarded... goalkeeper Guilherme

TACTICS

The bus is ready

Cherchesov changes his formation from 4-3-1-2, 4-2-3-1, 5-2-2-1 and 5-3-1-1, depending on the opponents' strength and style. "The bus" is always there ready to be parked, like it was in the 1-1 World Cup last 16 clash with Spain, eventually won on penalties. If Cherchesov does go with a back five, the starting wing-backs will likely be defenders by trade (Fernandes, Smolnikov, Karavayev or Zhirkov) rather than traditional wingers who are more comfortable going forward than defending – emphasising the coach's vigilant approach.

Young talents in midfield can certainly make a difference, but Cherchesov is often too cautious to fully rely on them, even though playmakers Aleksei Miranchuk and Golovin now have good experience playing in Europe. Three holding players is often his default set-up.

Lone striker Dzyuba is more likely to be joined by some of the attacking midfielders rather than another striker. Valencia's Denis Cheryshev, who was so good alongside Dzyuba three years ago at the World Cup, is too injury-prone to be considered a candidate this time.

Playmaker... Aleksandr Golovin

Wing-back... Mario Fernandes

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 1
v **Poland**
(a, Wroclaw)

Returning...Russia beat Egypt 3-1 in St. Petersburg during the 2018 World Cup group stage

GROUP GAMES
Jun 12
v **Belgium**
(St. Petersburg)
Jun 16
v **Finland**
(St. Petersburg)
Jun 21
v **Denmark**
(Copenhagen)

THE VIEW FROM RUSSIA

"Belgium will be hard to beat. It is between Russia and Denmark for second place, with our opponents having the advantage of playing at home in the last game, which may be decisive. Besides, the Danish players that perform at big European clubs have the experience most our players do not."

Egor Titov, coach and ex-international

"I would have rated Russia's chances higher if the tournament was held a year ago. The World Cup spirit is gone by now and the age of key players is 30 and above. The younger players are not ready to take their place yet. No quarter-final this time."

Konstantin Kleschev, TV pundit

World Cup hero... Cherchesov

COACH

Stanislav CHERCHESOV
Age 57 (02.09.63)
Appointed August 2016

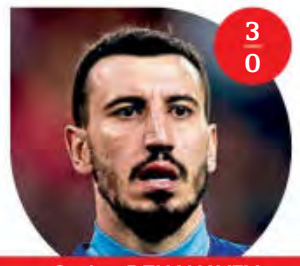
After Russia's 2018 World Cup heroics, Cherchesov got his contract extended until 2022. The former keeper won 49 caps and was a star at Spartak Moscow, replacing the famous Rinat Dasayev, before moving to Germany and Austria.

After coaching stints in Austria and Russia, a domestic double with Legia Warsaw in Poland caught the attention of the Russian Football Union, who offered him the top job. A strict disciplinarian, he does not tolerate dissent, but may be flexible when necessary, just like with his tactics.

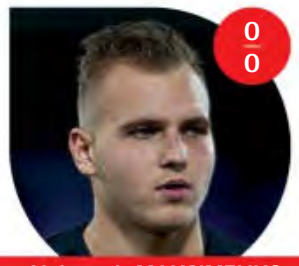
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS


3 / 0

Soslan DZHANAYEV
Sochi
Age 34 (13.03.87)
Usual choice as the third keeper. Coach Cherchesov likes this place to be taken by a reliable back-up who can ably assist him.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Aleksandr MAKSIMENKO
Spartak Moscow
Age 23 (19.03.98)
Good shot-stopper, but not always comfortable against crosses. He should be included after Russia failed to progress to the U21 Euros knockout stage.

10 / 0

Anton SHUNIN
Dynamo Moscow
Age 34 (27.01.87)
Dynamo fans' darling and club captain. Made his national team debut in 2007, but stayed in the shadow of Igor Akinfeev. Now ready to step out of it.

DEFENDERS

2 / 0

Igor DIVEYEV
CSKA Moscow
Age 21 (27.09.99)
Towering centre-back from the U21 team who almost made it as a professional volleyball player. Has a good shot but lacks stability.

31 / 1

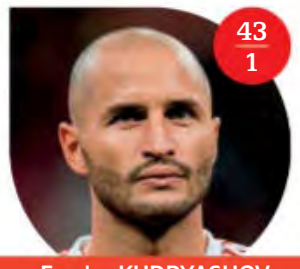
Georgi DZHIKIYA
Spartak Moscow
Age 27 (21.11.93)
Born in a Georgian refugee family in Moscow. Very good in the air, both at the back as a centre-half and up front on set-pieces, but lacks pace.

28 / 5

Mario FERNANDES
CSKA Moscow
Age 30 (19.09.90)
Granted Russian citizenship in 2016. The Brazilian-born attacking right-back was named Russian Football Gentleman of the Year in 2020. A key player.

11 / 1

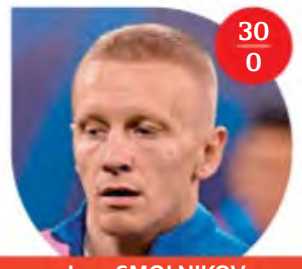
Vyacheslav KARAVAYEV
Zenit St. Petersburg
Age 25 (20.05.95)
The full-back's speed and good passing made him important at Sparta Prague and Vitesse, from where he was originally chosen by Cherchesov.


43 / 1

Fyodor KUDRYASHOV
Antalyaspor (Tur)
Age 34 (05.04.87)
Equally good at centre-back or left-back. He has been Cherchesov's regular choice, but not always supported by the media and fans.

24 / 0

Andrey SEMYONOV
Akhmat Grozny
Age 32 (24.03.89)
A tall experienced centre-back, who has been selected by different managers for his reliability and quick adjustment to new defensive partners.


30 / 0

Igor SMOLNIKOV
Krasnodar
Age 32 (08.08.88)
After seven seasons with Zenit, the pacy full-back lost his place there due to injuries but has since re-established himself at his former club.

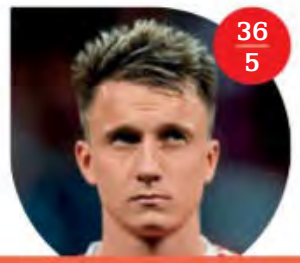
102 / 2

Yuri ZHIRKOV
Zenit St. Petersburg
Age 37 (20.08.83)
Turned into a left-back from a winger by Guus Hiddink before Euro 2008. Played for Chelsea from 2009 to 2011. One of only five players to win 100 caps.

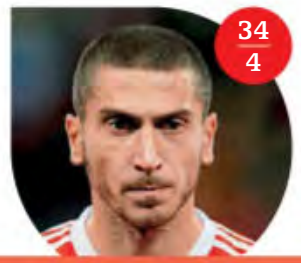
MIDFIELDERS

4 / 0

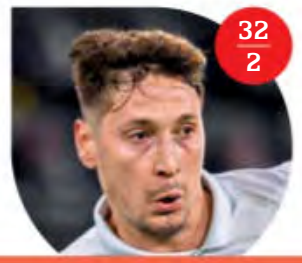
Dmitri BARINOV
Lokomotiv Moscow
Age 24 (11.09.96)
Reliable defensive midfielder with effective forward runs and scores important goals. Hit badly by injuries lately so a doubt for the finals.


36 / 5

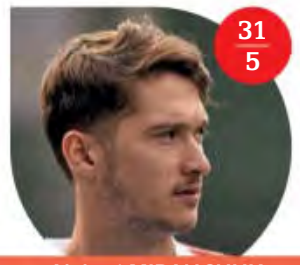
Aleksandr GOLOVIN
Monaco (Fra)
Age 24 (30.05.96)
Became Russia's best foreign-based player after joining Monaco in 2018. The creator scored in his first and second games for Russia aged just 19.


34 / 4

Aleksei IONOV
Krasnodar
Age 32 (18.02.89)
Pacy and spiky, Ionov adds to the national team's offensive strength and often comes on as a substitute to offer fresh legs and impetus.


32 / 2

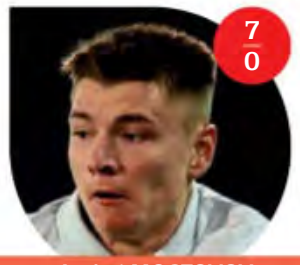
Daler KUZYAEV
Zenit St. Petersburg
Age 28 (15.01.93)
Returned to Zenit in 2020 after Cherchesov continued to select him despite his free-agent status. Versatile midfielder, effective as a substitute.


31 / 5

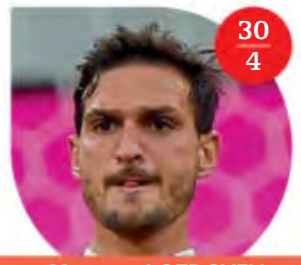
Aleksei MIRANCHUK
Atalanta (Ita)
Age 25 (17.10.95)
Left-footed playmaker who joined Atalanta from Lokomotiv Moscow last year, and has already scored some important goals in Italy.

19 / 3

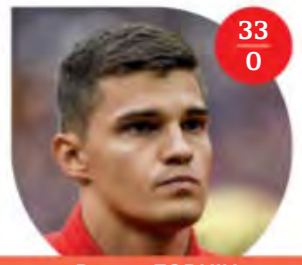
Anton MIRANCHUK
Lokomotiv Moscow
Age 25 (17.10.95)
Maybe even more talented than his twin brother playing in the same position, but still waiting for a chance in Europe to showcase his talent.


7 / 0

Andrei MOSTOVOY
Zenit St. Petersburg
Age 23 (05.11.97)
No relation to former Russian international Aleksandr "Tzar" Mostovoy. The most likely midfield squad choice from a group of young candidates.

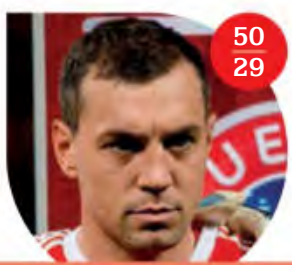

30 / 4

Magomed OZDOYEV
Zenit St. Petersburg
Age 28 (05.11.92)
Chechen-born, unyielding but ill-tempered central midfielder and the grandson of a WWII hero pilot. Versatile player and a very good shooter.


33 / 0

Roman ZOBNIN
Spartak Moscow
Age 27 (11.02.94)
Siberian-born workhorse and "universal soldier". Intelligent and versatile holding midfielder who can also play up front or move to the wing.

FORWARDS


50 / 29

Artem DZYUBA
Zenit St. Petersburg
Age 32 (22.08.88)
The 6ft 6in World Cup hero lost his captaincy temporarily due to some unwise social media self-exposure, but not his pivotal role on the pitch.

39 / 14

Fyodor SMOLOV
Lokomotiv Moscow
Age 31 (05.02.90)
Missed in the 2018 World Cup quarter-final penalty shootout versus Croatia. Could return to the squad for the Euros after a two-year absence.

5 / 2

Aleksandr SOBOLEV
Spartak Moscow
Age 24 (07.03.97)
Another tall striker. He has no place next to Dzyuba in the starting line-up, but is a perfect substitute option in the case of emergencies.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Yuri DYUPIN (Rubin Kazan), Andrey LUNYOV (Zenit St. Petersburg), Matvei SAFONOV (Krasnodar)
DEFENDERS Ilya KUTEPOV (Spartak Moscow), Roman NEUSTADTER (Dynamo Moscow), Roman YEVGENYEV (Dynamo Moscow), Aleksandr ZHIROV (Sandhausen, Ger)
MIDFIELDERS Ilzat AKHMETOV (CSKA Moscow), Daniil FOMIN (Dynamo Moscow), Konstantin KUCHAYEV (CSKA Moscow), Daniil LESOVOY (Dynamo Moscow), Denis MAKAROV (Rubin Kazan), Rifat ZHEMALETDINOV (Lokomotiv Moscow)
FORWARDS Anton ZABOLOTNY (Sochi)

Back at last

Scotland are desperate to make an impact at their first major tournament since 1998

There is a phrase in Scotland. "Only Scotland could..."

For 22 years, it was used to describe the ways that successive Scotland sides contrived to rob themselves of qualification in whatever campaign. Like beating World Cup finalists France in Paris in 2007, then blowing their passage to Euro 2008 by losing in Georgia.

All of that was swept away when Steve Clarke's team secured Scotland's place at Euro 2020, their first major finals since the 1998 World Cup.

However, the prize of reaching the first European Championship finals since 1996 came with a caveat for one of the joint-hosts. With England already qualified, being paired in the same group meant giving up a "home" game and going to Wembley instead – a repeat of their last Euros appearance, when they were beaten 2-0 thanks to an Alan Shearer header, a Gary McAllister missed penalty and Paul Gascoigne's famous volley.

So, the new phrase for Scottish fans is: "Only Scotland could qualify for a tournament it's co-hosting...and have to play a home game in London." Just to rub salt in the wounds, the Czech Republic have already taken Scotland's own £33 million Oriam training centre in Edinburgh while Croatia snapped up St. Andrews, used by Barcelona and Manchester United in the past.

Back in the 1970s, during the Home Internationals with England, Wembley would be taken over by 50,000 Scottish fans. When the countries met at Euro '96, it was equally passionate. On the countries' last meeting in 2016, the Tartan Army filled Trafalgar Square on the day of the game, as per tradition. Whether they'll be able to do so this summer is another matter, with plans to make the landmark a ticket-only fan zone threatening the traditional party.

> Only Scotland could qualify for a tournament it's co-hosting...and have to play a home game in London

London is not a problem for Clarke. It is his adopted home, after ten years as a Chelsea defender. Clarke won an FA Cup at Wembley and the League Cup, but does not shout about those achievements from the rooftops.

Captain... Andy Robertson epitomises Scotland's team spirit

"When he was young, I think Steve had an operation to remove his ego," joked former Chelsea and Scotland colleague, Pat Nevin. "You can't work with Jose Mourinho or Kenny Dalglish at Liverpool, unless you are good. On the training ground, top players will smell BS."

It's a cliché in football to talk about "a team with no stars" but that is undoubtedly what Scotland are. No egos. No Neymars not willing to track back. Indeed, captain Andy Robertson symbolises the team. He has no ego even though he is a Champions League winner with Liverpool, coming the "long road" after teenage rejection by Celtic, via Queen's Park and Dundee United.

That's very much in Clarke's image and that graft will be key for Scotland to be successful.

Phil Gordon

STEVE CLARKE

In the time between Scotland beating Serbia and the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, did you notice a change in the players?
When we got them into training before facing Austria, I looked at the standard and said to [coach] John Carver that we have given ourselves a problem because the standard had gone up. It was good to see. You can tell the players are happy and hopefully that bodes well for the future.

With all the euphoria, are you concerned players might get caught up in the hype?
The players are excellent and deserve all the credit for getting to Euro 2020, but I have told them they want to be successful and not just qualify for one tournament. I want them to be consistently successful. Not rest on their laurels and wait 24 years before another. I will be in my 80s if I have to wait that long!

The pandemic curbed public celebrations but how did you celebrate qualifying?
I just went home and spent time with my family. I didn't really think about it too much. I've got to be honest, I finished the week disappointed because we lost the last two Nations League games after the Serbia

Ending the wait... celebrating after beating Serbia in the qualifying play-offs

play-off, but that's just the life of a football manager. So I've not been basking in it.

How impressed have you been with the form of Scott McTominay for Manchester United this season?
He has done really well and to become a first choice in that Manchester United team is not an easy thing with the competition they have at Old Trafford for places. He finished last autumn playing centre-back for Scotland but we need to use him in midfield, too. So I have brought Jack Hendry in and he has all the same attributes – tall, uses the ball well. He is a good player with the attributes of a modern defender. I am surprised it didn't work out for him at Celtic, initially, but he's done very well on loan in Belgium.

You are having to make Scotland's training camp in the north-east of England. Do you believe getting out of the country will be a benefit?
We haven't got Oriam [in Edinburgh], which is our usual base. The Czech Republic had the first crack at it and the Croatians have taken St. Andrews, which would have been a good facility for us too. There might be a lot of hype at home. But I think being away from it, being detached, will benefit us in terms of preparation and making sure we are ready for the matches.

Key performer... Manchester United's Scott McTominay

Scotland are the fourth-seeded team in a really tough group. Do you have a target where your side can finish?
We are not going to the Euros just to play the group games – we want to get out of the group. We want to be the first Scotland team to get to the knockout stages of a major tournament. That would be fantastic.

Phil Gordon

TACTICS

Tale of two top left-backs

The "only Scotland could" mantra might also have applied to the fact that the country's two outstanding players play in the same position – left-backs Robertson and Kieran Tierney. Except Steve Clarke has found a way to make it work. The 3-4-1-2 allows Tierney and Robertson to feature on the left, with the Liverpool man more advanced. Clarke used the same template to great success at Kilmarnock, and the idea is simple: be hard to beat and don't concede.

The main change since beating Serbia however is Scott McTominay stepping into the midfield role that he has excelled in at Manchester United, leaving a space in the back three to be inherited.

Scotland are blessed with midfield talent, but meagre in attack. The role of target man was given to Australia-born Lyndon Dykes – more for his physicality and ability to hold the ball up than his goals – although new boy Che Adams impressed in March's World Cup qualifiers.

Ryan Christie, John McGinn and Callum McGregor get forward to offer support from midfield, with Stuart Armstrong and Ryan Fraser further options. The other plus for Scotland, will be the return of Celtic winger James Forrest on the right.

Strong left side... Kieran Tierney

New addition... Che Adams switched his international allegiance in March

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 2
v **Netherlands**
(n, Faro)
Jun 6
v **Luxembourg**
(a, Venue TBC)

Hampden Park... Scotland are at home for two group games

GROUP GAMES
Jun 14
v **Czech Republic**
(Glasgow)
Jun 18
v **England**
(London)
Jun 22
v **Croatia**
(Glasgow)

THE VIEW FROM SCOTLAND

"Although the hype will surround Scotland's middle match against England at Wembley, their chances of progress are likely to rest on taking four points from a possible six in the two games either side of it against the Czech Republic and Croatia at Hampden."

Douglas Alexander, The Sunday Times

"The return of James Forrest from injury was too late to help Celtic or Neil Lennon, but Steve Clarke and Scotland will benefit from him at the Euros. He has great talent and is brave – he has that 'Jimmy Johnstone thing' where if he gets kicked he just gets up again."

Gordon Strachan, ex-Scotland manager

Experienced... Clarke has been coaching since 1998

COACH

Steve CLARKE
Age 57 (29.08.63)
Appointed May 2019

A late-starter in management, not getting his first job until 49 at West Bromwich Albion in 2012. Didn't finish his playing career at Chelsea until 35, and became Jose Mourinho's assistant manager at Stamford Bridge before filling the same role for Kenny Dalglish at Liverpool. After managing Reading, Clarke returned to Scottish football to take charge of Kilmarnock in 2017, and turned the relegation-threatened side into Europa League qualifiers. He was the choice of Scotland supporters to replace Alex McLeish in May 2019.

THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

56 / 0

Craig GORDON
Hearts
Age 38 (31.12.82)
Previous long-term first-choice who returned home to Hearts from Celtic to maintain first-team football. An excellent shot stopper.

43 / 0

David MARSHALL
Derby County (Eng)
Age 36 (05.03.85)
Underlined first-pick status with his play-off penalty shootout heroics. Broke through at Celtic aged 19 when knocking Barcelona out of the UEFA Cup in 2004.

2 / 0

Jon McLAUGHLIN
Rangers
Age 33 (09.09.87)
Likely third-choice. Dependable. Second pick at Rangers this season. Like Gordon, has Hearts and Sunderland on his CV. Made his Scotland debut in 2018.

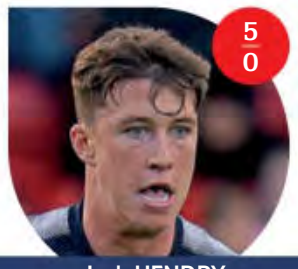
DEFENDERS

7 / 0

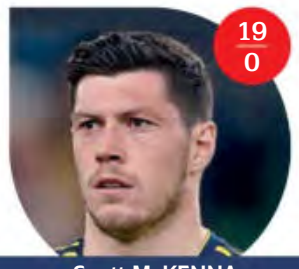
Declan GALLAGHER
Motherwell
Age 30 (13.02.91)
Rugged centre-back. Jettisoned by Celtic youths, he shone for Livingston before his Motherwell move in 2019. Rarely loses for Clarke.

32 / 2

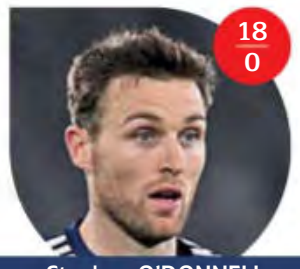
Grant HANLEY
Norwich City (Eng)
Age 29 (20.11.91)
Traditional Scottish defender. Returning to his best form after two years of injury at Norwich – as he proved with his recent goal and display versus Austria.


5 / 0

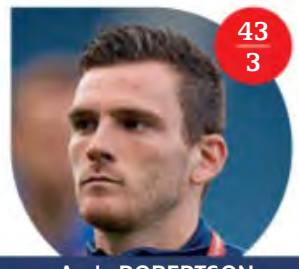
Jack HENDRY
Oostende (Blg)
Age 26 (07.05.95)
Surprise inclusion. Endured a torrid time at Celtic, especially in Europe, but the footballing centre-back has shone on loan at Oostende in Belgium.


19 / 0

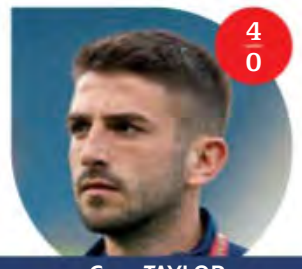
Scott McKENNA
Nottingham Forest (Eng)
Age 24 (12.11.96)
Physical central defender who came through Aberdeen's youth system. First capped in 2018 and moved to Forest last September as the Dons' record sale.


18 / 0

Stephen O'DONNELL
Motherwell
Age 29 (11.05.92)
Right-back who emerged with Clarke at Kilmarnock. Capped by Strachan in 2018. Another product of Celtic's youth system who flourished elsewhere.


43 / 3

Andy ROBERTSON
Liverpool (Eng)
Age 27 (11.03.94)
Captain's fairy tale. Released by Celtic at 15. Via Queen's Park, Dundee United and Hull City. One of Europe's best left-backs after his Liverpool success.

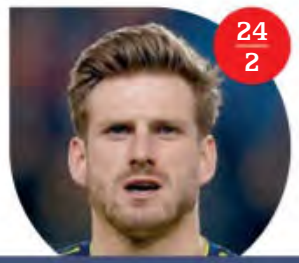

4 / 0

Greg TAYLOR
Celtic
Age 23 (05.11.97)
The left-back also played under Clarke at Kilmarnock, who gave him his Scotland debut in 2019 v Belgium. Signed by Celtic as Kieran Tierney's replacement.

MIDFIELDERS

19 / 0

Kieran TIERNEY
Arsenal (Eng)
Age 23 (05.06.97)
Won every domestic honour at Celtic. Club debut at 17, Scotland at 18, followed by a £25m move to Arsenal where he's seen as a future club captain. Injury-prone.


24 / 2

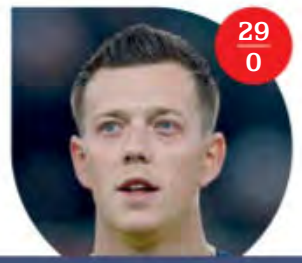
Stuart ARMSTRONG
Southampton (Eng)
Age 29 (30.03.92)
Emerged with Robertson at Dundee United. Moved to Celtic in 2014 and part of the 2017 "Invincibles" before a £7m switch to Southampton.

18 / 4

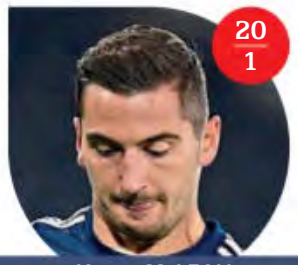
Ryan CHRISTIE
Celtic
Age 26 (22.02.95)
Needed patience at Celtic after joining from Inverness. The exit of Armstrong presented a chance, which he seized. A potent scorer, he netted in the play-off final.

32 / 10

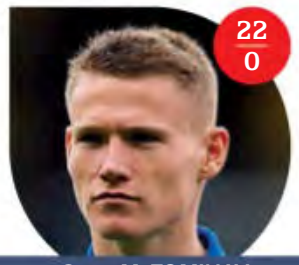
John McGINN
Aston Villa (Eng)
Age 26 (18.10.94)
The midfielder has risen to great heights since his £2.5m move to Villa from Hibernian, where he got his Scotland debut. Created by St. Mirren's youth academy.


29 / 0

Callum McGREGOR
Celtic
Age 27 (14.06.93)
His Champions League goal v Bayern Munich in 2017 saw Brendan Rodgers laud McGregor as "a European star." Celtic's new captain from next season.


20 / 1

Kenny McLEAN
Norwich City (Eng)
Age 29 (08.01.92)
Scored the winning penalties in shootouts with Serbia and Israel. Another St. Mirren graduate, Aberdeen gave him the platform for his Canaries switch in 2018.

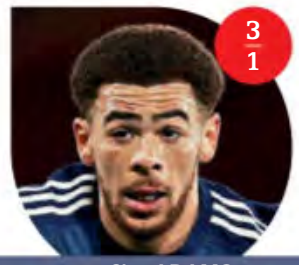

22 / 0

Scott McTOMINAY
Manchester United (Eng)
Age 24 (08.12.96)
Quantum leap campaign for United in his preferred midfield position even though he's been a Scotland defender. Lancashire accent, Scottish father.

0 / 0

David TURNBULL
Celtic
Age 21 (10.07.99)
Stellar season at Celtic after £3m move from Motherwell. Hit the Europa League winner v Lille and can work with McGregor. The likely beneficiary of Ryan Jack's injury.

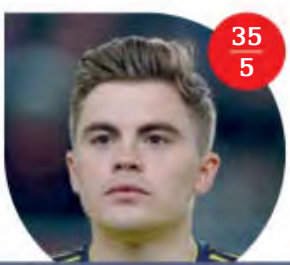
FORWARDS


3 / 1

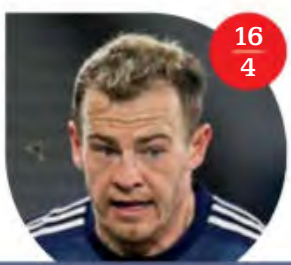
Che ADAMS
Southampton (Eng)
Age 24 (13.07.96)
A late addition by Clarke. Leicester-born striker on Scotland's radar since 2017 before his £15m move to Southampton. Small and pacy.

10 / 2

Lyndon DYKES
Queens Park Rangers (Eng)
Age 25 (07.10.95)
Aussie moved to his parents' hometown Dumfries to launch his career at Queen of the South. Shone at Livingston. Hit his first Scotland goal v Czech Republic.


35 / 5

James FORREST
Celtic
Age 29 (07.07.91)
Scottish Player of the Year in 2018-19 and peerless in 2019-20 – as Lazio discovered in Europe. The winger has pace, goals and assists, but is very injury-prone.


16 / 4

Ryan FRASER
Newcastle United (Eng)
Age 27 (24.02.94)
Diminutive, skilful winger who made his Aberdeen debut at 16 before his Bournemouth and Newcastle moves. Hit Scotland's winner v the Czechs in 2020.

22 / 4

Leigh GRIFFITHS
Celtic
Age 30 (20.08.90)
Prolific Celtic striker who has been plagued by fitness issues. Netted two free-kicks v England in 2017. Likely to edge out the Olis – McBurnie and Burke.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Scott BAIN (Celtic)
DEFENDERS Andrew CONSIDINE (Aberdeen), Liam COOPER (Leeds United, Eng), Paul HANLON (Hibernian), Liam PALMER (Sheffield Wednesday, Eng)
MIDFIELDERS John FLECK (Sheffield United, Eng), Billy GILMOUR (Chelsea, Eng), Ryan JACK (Rangers) *injured*
FORWARDS Oliver BURKE (Sheffield United, Eng), Oli MCBURNIE (Sheffield United, Eng) *injured*, Kevin NISBET (Hibernian), Callum PATERSON (Sheffield Wednesday, Eng), Lawrence SHANKLAND (Dundee United)

Determined to perform

But the Slovaks are up against it in Group E

The decision by Marek Hamsik to break his lucrative contract with Dalian Pro in China and base himself in Europe this spring, gaining match practice at Sweden's Gothenburg, shows the determination of Slovakia's talismanic captain to lead his team out of a tough group at Euro 2020. After all, it has happened twice before at major tournaments. A Hamsik-led Slovakia knocked defending champions Italy out of the 2010 World Cup, then held on for a grim goalless draw with England at Euro 2016. Each time, the subsequent knockout round proved a match too far.

This time, Slovakia's group comprises Spain, Poland and Sweden, with Hamsik's new-found home perhaps the most likely opponents to cede all three points. The coach this time is Stefan Tarkovic, assistant to Jan Kozak at Euro 2016. Team-mates from previous finals appearances, defender Peter Pekarik, midfielders Juraj Kucka and Robert Mak, and striker Ondrej Duda, still provide the backbone of the team, along with Hamsik himself.

Emotional...Marek Hamsik and Juraj Kucka against Northern Ireland

Coach Stefan Tarkovic, who came in as a late replacement between those two play-offs, will have to organise his back-line without Martin Skrtel. Bringing six seasons of Serie A experience to the back four and preferred by Tarkovic will be Milan Skriniar, considered Skrtel's successor and integral to the success of Internazionale this campaign.

Up front, Michal Duris, whose extra-time goal in Belfast put Slovakia into the finals, has been a regular for table-topping Omonia Nicosia in Cyprus. In what will surely be his last hurrah, Duris looks likely to spearhead the one-man attack Tarkovic also prefers.

Peterjon Cresswell

> A Hamsik-led Slovakia knocked defending champions Italy out of the 2010 World Cup, then held on for a grim goalless draw with England at Euro 2016. Each time, the subsequent knockout round proved a match too far

The main change is in defence, where Fulham goalkeeper Marek Rodak proved the hero in two narrow wins in the qualifying play-offs. His clean sheet and shootout save against Alan Browne ended Irish hopes in Bratislava, before his solid hands kept a feisty Northern Ireland side to a solitary late own goal in Belfast. Counting against him this summer will be his lack of first-team action at Craven Cottage this season.

Waiting in the wings is 24-year-old Dominik Greif, while veterans Dusan Kuciak and Martin Dubravka appeared in World Cup qualifying games in March and are also in contention to step in.

STEFAN TARKOVIC

What lessons did you learn from Euro 2016 when Slovakia exited in the knockouts?
Slovakia is a small and young country and, having qualified for the Euros, we started to write our own history as it was the first participation since Czechoslovakia split up. The team's balance was right and following a string of good results, we also had enough self-confidence. The aim was to qualify from the group, which we achieved. In the round of 16, we took on Germany whom we had beaten 3-1 in a friendly. We lost 3-0, even though there were moments when we could have come back in the game. We did not take our chances and deserved to lose. Overall, our participation at the Euros was a good experience. We met the objectives we had set for ourselves. The players gained experience that helped them at club level.

What are Milan Skriniar's main qualities?
Milan quickly imposed himself at Inter despite the tough competition. He is a modern centre-back with well-balanced defensive and attacking skills. He constantly strives to improve and his hard work bears fruit. He has all it takes to become a leader of our defence. I'm happy to have such a player in the team and I hope he stays fit.

Euphoric...Slovakia players celebrate their first goal versus Northern Ireland in the Euros play-off

Will your captain Marek Hamsik be able to cope with the short-lived intensity of a major tournament?
Marek is important for the team – he is an outstanding figure. There's no need to remind us of his playing career. What I appreciate about him is his work ethic and that he is always 100 per cent ready to help the national team and share the wealth of his experience. These are essential qualities that Marek is known for. The experience he has gained can tilt the balance in our favour in tough games. Every player that has certain qualities can help the national team. I see our players as a team and Marek is a big part of it.

What do you make of Group E?
Spain are in very good form at the moment, having recently beaten Germany 6-0. I think Poland are very strong too. We played against them in a friendly during Jan Kozak's era, and won 2-0. Seven years on, they are a compact side with strong personalities. The same can be said about Sweden. As one of the top players in Europe and in the world, Ibrahimovic is a great asset to Sweden, but even without him they're well-organised. Both Poland and Sweden are good teams with strong individual players.

Respect...Tarkovic celebrates with Michal Duris against Northern Ireland

What will Slovakia's ambitions be at the European Championship?
We are aware that the teams in our group are higher up in the FIFA rankings. We are entering the tournament as one of the underdogs. On the other hand, I think all the teams that have made it to the Euros are competitive. If things go well for us, that is to say, if the players are in form, play regularly at their clubs and our key players are not injured, I dare say we can be tough opposition for any of the teams in our group.

Samindra Kunti

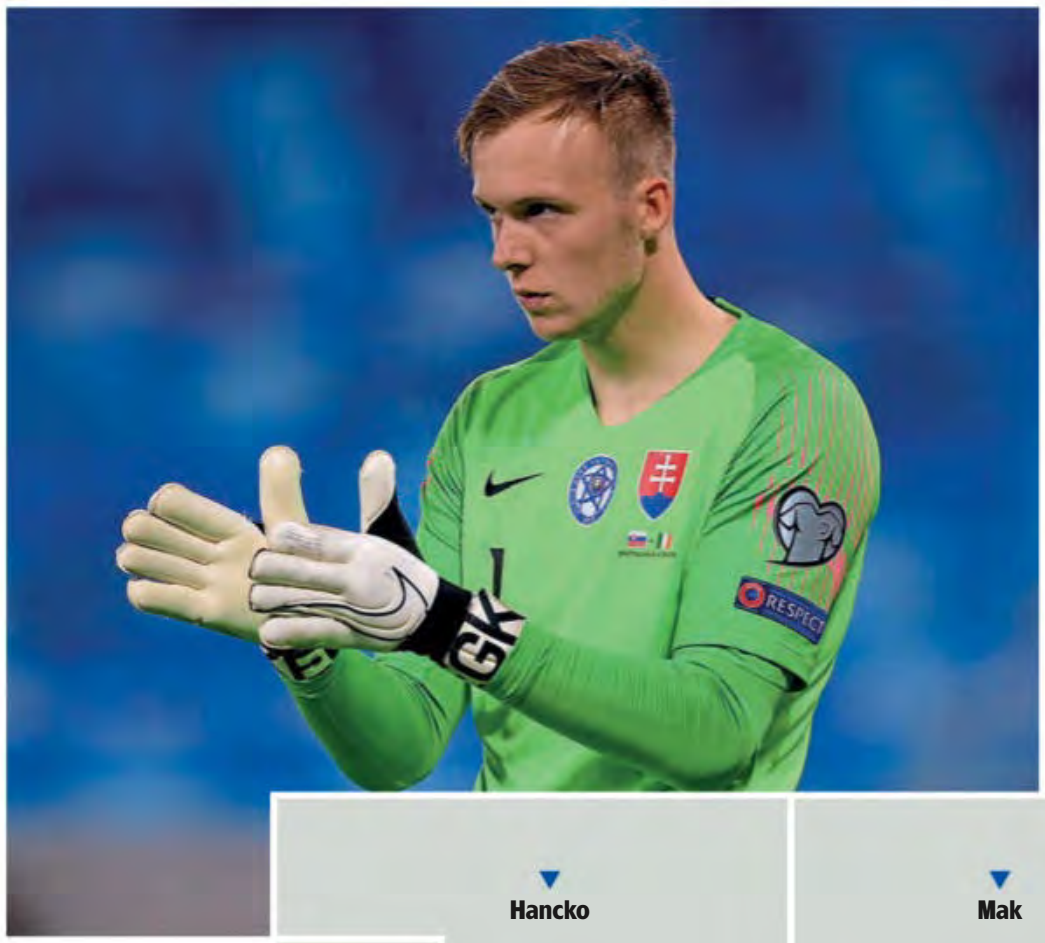
TACTICS

Keeping it tight

The 4-1-4-1 formation preferred by Stefan Tarkovic relies on Stanislav Lobotka (or Patrik Hrosovsky) to pivot between the back four and the midfield quartet, freeing up the ageing but savvy Marek Hamsik and Juraj Kucka to raid and try shots from deep. Kucka's deflected goal that sank Scotland in the Nations League last November is a case in point.

Tarkovic has no shortage of flank players to stretch attacks, but Slovakia are yet to produce another classic target man in the mould of Robert Vittek, hero of the 2010 World Cup, then discarded. There were only three pure strikers in the 23-man squad for Euro 2016 – Slovakia don't score many but don't concede easily either.

In defence, the assurance and top-class experience of Milan Skriniar spreads confidence when Slovakia's top two goalkeepers, Marek Rodak and Dominik Greif, are in their early twenties. If Tarkovic picks Rodak, the Fulham man has been known to score in the dying minutes, his charge upfield something for the opposition to consider in these days of long stoppage-time periods. Lubomir Satka and Norbert Gyomber are locked in a battle to partner Skriniar.



Solid...Marek Rodak proved the hero in two narrow wins in the Euro qualifying play-offs

Free...Marek Hamsik has license to roam

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 1
v **Bulgaria**
(n, Ried im Innkreis)
Jun 6
v **Austria**
(a, Vienna)

Impressive...Milan Skriniar is the rock in Slovakia's defence

GROUP GAMES
Jun 14
v **Poland**
(Dublin)
Jun 18
v **Sweden**
(Dublin)
Jun 23
v **Spain**
(Bilbao)

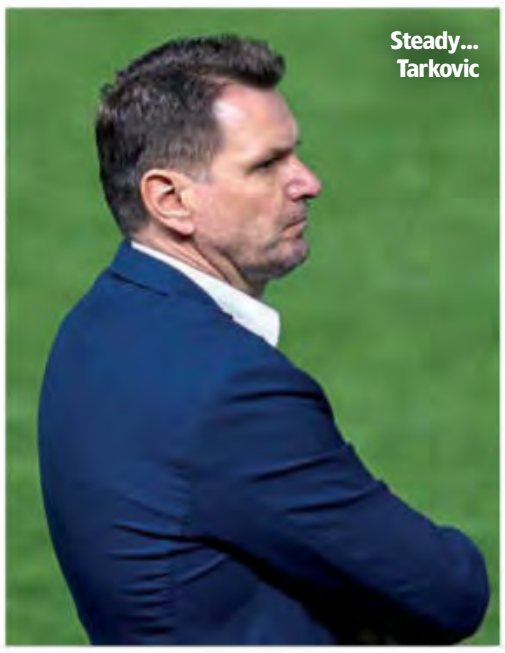
THE VIEW FROM SLOVAKIA

"In 2016, Slovakia were more mature, our players were in better shape and Martin Skrtel was a great motivator. Milan Skriniar is playing well at Inter but our goalkeepers aren't first-choice at their clubs. Stanislav Lobotka is clever and creative, but doesn't start at Napoli. Anything is possible."

Pavol Spal, SME journalist

"In Slovakia, there is no talk of the round of 16 but, after making it through a very difficult play-off, our determination is clear. Today's team is built on collective strength and a cohesive spirit. Sweden will be our most difficult match – we've not beaten them in five games."

Peter Surin, Slovak FA marketing



Steady... Tarkovic

COACH

Stefan TARKOVIC
Age 48 (18.02.73)
Appointed October 2020

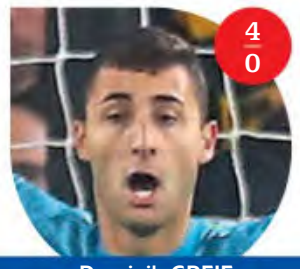
Stefan Tarkovic stepped into the breach on the eve of the vital play-off against Northern Ireland, a surprising but bold move by the Slovak FA. His predecessor, the Czech Pavel Hapal, had only just led Slovakia in the earlier play-off win over the Republic of Ireland.

Tarkovic was brought in to steady the ship and impose his favoured 4-1-4-1 system. Assistant to Jan Kozak at Euro 2016, he began his managerial career as Slovakia Women's Under-19s coach, and later the Men's Under-18s. He was given a permanent contract in December.

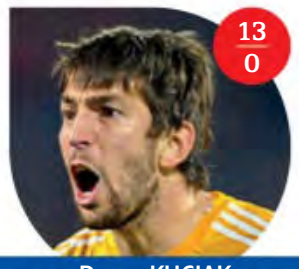
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

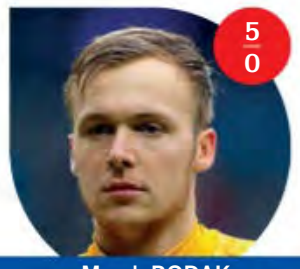
GOALKEEPERS



Dominik GREIF
Slovan Bratislava
Age 24 (06.04.97)
First-choice goalkeeper at Slovan since 2018-19, Greif may get the nod over Rodak given his regular first-team appearances this season.

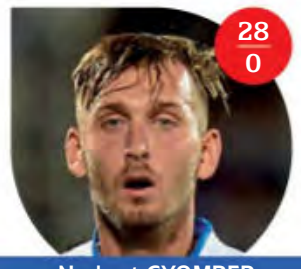


Dusan KUCIAK
Lechia Gdansk (Pol)
Age 35 (21.05.85)
Reliable squad keeper, with the national side since 2006. A regular for Lechia Gdansk, challenging for Europe in Poland's Ekstraklasa.

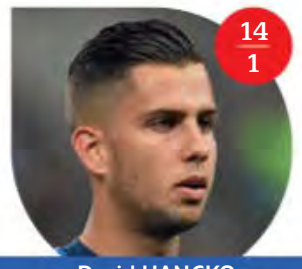


Marek RODAK
Fulham (Eng)
Age 24 (13.12.96)
Making his debut in 2020, Rodak rose to prominence in the Euro play-offs as the hero of the penalty shootout win over the Republic of Ireland.

DEFENDERS

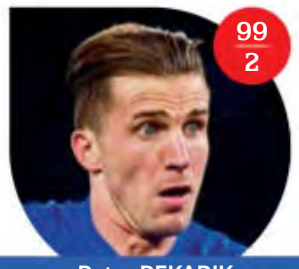


Norbert GYOMBER
Salernitana (Ita)
Age 28 (03.07.92)
Used on the left in Slovakia's defeat to Germany at Euro 2016 and a contender to fill in at the back again this time. An uncompromising defender.

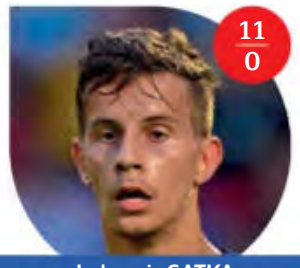


David HANCKO
Sparta Prague (Cze)
Age 23 (13.12.97)
Slovakia's preferred left-back, the Fiorentina loanee, who can also play as centre-back, got his career back on track after a disappointing spell in Italy.

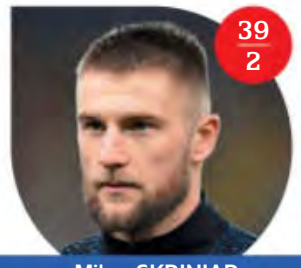
Lukas PAUSCHEK
Slovan Bratislava
Age 28 (09.12.92)
Dependable right-back who won his first cap in 2012 and has never moved far from home to ply his trade. Should provide cover for Peter Pekarik.



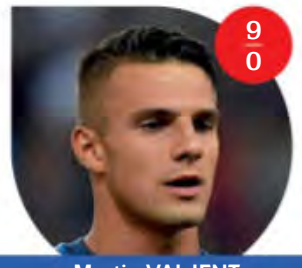
Peter PEKARIK
Hertha Berlin (Ger)
Age 34 (30.10.86)
Stalwart right-back heading for a century of caps and still a fixture at Hertha Berlin after nine seasons in the German capital.



Lubomir SATKA
Lech Poznan (Pol)
Age 25 (02.12.95)
On Newcastle United's books as an U21 centre-back before a move to DAC helped him become a regular in the full national squad.



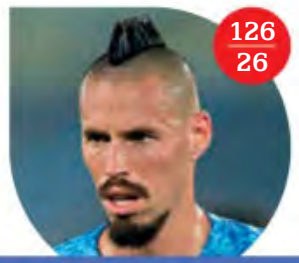
Milan SKRINIAR
Internazionale (Ita)
Age 26 (11.02.95)
Integral to Inter's bid to win a first *Scudetto* since 2010, centre-back Skriniar is the biggest Slovak success in Serie A since Marek Hamsik.



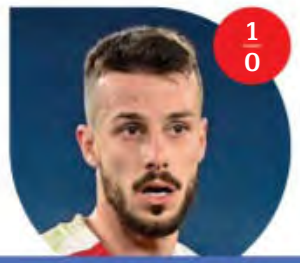
Martin VALJENT
Mallorca (Spa)
Age 25 (11.12.95)
Solid form in Mallorca's bid for promotion has pushed this centre-back into contention once more in Slovakia's national set-up.

MIDFIELDERS

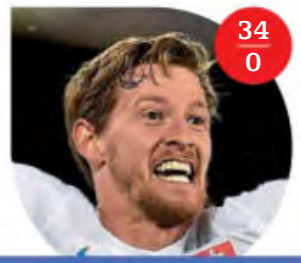
Jan GREGUS
Minnesota United (USA)
Age 30 (29.01.91)
Scorer of Slovakia's decisive penalty in the shootout win over the Republic of Ireland, Gregus has been a national team regular since 2015.



Marek HAMSIK
Gothenburg (Swe)
Age 33 (27.07.87)
Still sporting his trademark Mohawk, indispensable Slovakia captain Hamsik aims to end his illustrious international career on a high at Euro 2020.

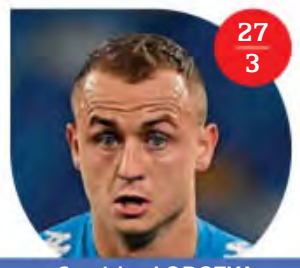


Jakub HROMADA
Slavia Prague (Cze)
Age 24 (25.05.96)
Performances in Slavia Prague's Europa League run pushed this former Under-21 regular into the spotlight for Slovakia's March 2022 World Cup qualifiers.

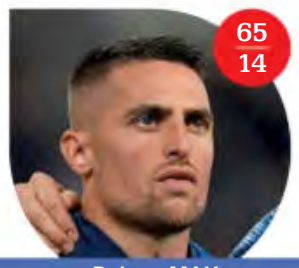


Patrik HROSOVSKY
Genk (Blg)
Age 29 (22.04.92)
A long-term dispute with his first club Viktoria Plzen stalled the central midfielder's career, now gaining a gradual reboot at Genk.

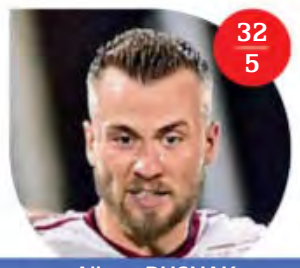
Juraj KUCKA
Parma (Ita)
Age 34 (26.02.87)
Midfield partner of Marek Hamsik at two major finals, the Serie A stalwart is also seeing out an impressive international career.



Stanislav LOBOTKA
Napoli (Ita)
Age 26 (25.11.94)
The midfield lynchpin learned football savvy at Jong Ajax before successful stints at Nordsjaelland, Celta Vigo and, currently, Napoli.



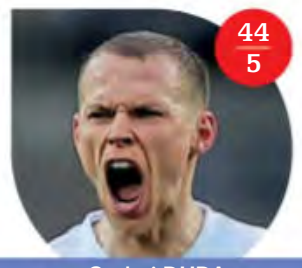
Robert MAK
Ferencvaros (Hun)
Age 30 (08.03.91)
A winner of the FA Youth Cup with Manchester City back in 2007-08, winger Mak has revived his career at flourishing Ferencvaros.



Albert RUSNAK
Real Salt Lake (USA)
Age 26 (07.07.94)
A product of the academy at Manchester City where his father was a scout, Rusnak spearheads the midfield at Real Salt Lake.

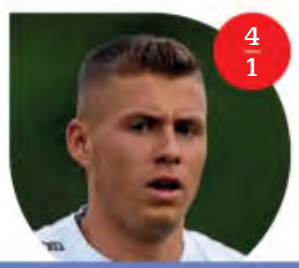
FORWARDS

Robert BOZENIK
Feyenoord (Ned)
Age 21 (18.11.99)
On the fringes of Feyenoord's first team, this young talent will relish the opportunity of shining at the Euros if chosen. Hasn't scored since 2019.

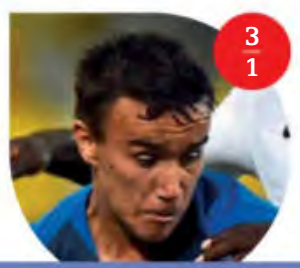


Ondrej DUDA
Cologne (Ger)
Age 26 (05.12.94)
Forward or attacking midfielder, and a goalscoring striker at Euro 2016, Duda has been battling to keep Cologne in the Bundesliga during the current campaign.

Michal DURIS
Omonia Nicosia (Cyp)
Age 32 (01.06.88)
Slovakia's most trusted striker isn't prolific, but his goals are often vital – his winner defeated Northern Ireland in the Euro 2020 qualifying play-offs.



Samuel MRAZ
Zaglebie Lubin (Pol)
Age 24 (13.05.97)
Top scorer and Player of the Year in the Slovak League in 2017-18, Mraz has yet to fully establish himself in the national team's starting line-up.



David STRELEC
Slovan Bratislava
Age 20 (04.04.01)
Scoring regularly as a teenager at Slovan, Strelec recently received full national honours after appearing for Slovakia at five youth levels.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Martin DUBRAVKA (Newcastle United, Eng)
DEFENDERS Jakub HOLUBEK (Piast Gliwice, Pol) Tomas HUBOCAN (Omonia Nicosia, Cyp), Martin KOSCELNIK (Slovan Liberec, Cze), Robert MAZAN (Karvina, Cze)
MIDFIELDERS Laszlo BENES (Augsburg, Ger), Matus BERO (Vitesse, Ned), Lukas HARASLIN (Sassuolo, Ita), Vladimir WEISS (Slovan Bratislava)
FORWARDS Ivan SCHRANZ (Jablonec, Cze), Tomas SUSLOV (Groningen, Ned), Adam ZRELAK (Warta Poznan, Pol)

A state of uncertainty

Questions still hang over the Spanish side – in spite of Nations League thrashing of Germany

"I'm not worried that we have won only one game in five," Luis Enrique said. It was March and his team had just been held 1-1 by Greece in Granada, the optimism evaporating. There was, the Spain coach insisted, no need to be alarmed. Those were just "opportunistic statistics". Greece had been fortunate: they had scored with their only shot, a penalty gifted to them out of nothing. And anyway, that one win was against Germany. And they had scored *six*, yes six, producing a perfect performance.

But now the team that cut through Germany had crashed against Greece. And that, in a nutshell, is where Spain seem to be. In a state of uncertainty, no one really sure what their true level is, who they are. Which says something about football and human nature perhaps, here especially: from euphoria to depression in just two games, two totally different identities. Capable of hammering Germany, incapable of beating Greece. Some of the old qualities were there; some of the old flaws were too.

When Luis Enrique returned to the job, he said that his "first list" was 74 players long. At times, it felt like that was no exaggeration. He has always been a coach with an eye not just on talent but on moments, on form. "I'd like to have a fixed XI but that's not the case and I would be stupid to do that," he said. "It depends what condition they're in when they get to the final two months of the season, that will be decisive. If they don't fly in the last two months, they have fewer chances of making it."

The uncertainty can at times be disconcerting, which made the Germany win so pleasing. That night, everything seemed to fall into place: there was a sense of purpose, a clarity of ideas: quick, incisive and deadly. There also seemed to be a line-up forming. Against Greece, nine of the players from that win started again. Only Sergi Roberto and Pau Torres, both out injured, did not. Here was an XI, it seemed. But, by the final whistle, the feeling could hardly have been more different.

Upset...Greece earned a 1-1 draw in March

Anyone can get frustrated by an ultra-defensive team but there were echoes of the Russia World Cup too, of a Spain team that could dominate possession but struggle to create chances against those who came and parked the bus. "The difference between this and Germany is what they tried to do," Luis Enrique said. Thing is, that was a recurring theme. "Now we have to analyse and work out what we can do better." And then? Can Spain win the Euros? "Yes," he replied, "I have analysed this and of course. We're on a level with Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands, Germany and Croatia, and there are always surprises."

Sid Lowe

> The team that cut through Germany had crashed against Greece. And that, in a nutshell, is where Spain seem to be. In a state of uncertainty

LUIS ENRIQUE

How will it feel to manage Spain at your first major international tournament this summer at the Euros?
It makes me very proud to lead Spain at a European Championship. As a player I went to three World Cups, a European Championship and the Olympics. Spain are clearly one of the favourites but there are eight teams that can win it. It means a lot to me to have a challenge as attractive as this. Seven games to be champions. We know how hard it will be but we're all really looking forward to it.

Do you know your first-choice starting XI yet or are there places still up for grabs?
I would love to have a starting XI that everyone could reel off from memory but that's not the situation we're in at the moment.

Are you confident Spain can go all the way and win the European Championship for the fourth time in its history?
The Spanish supporters have reason to be excited. Qualification was brilliant. The line that separates winning and losing is so fine, and all the more so in tournaments like this one, which isn't a league where the best team wins over 38 games. Luck is a factor

Thrashing...Spanish players celebrate their 6-0 victory over Germany

in tournaments. Lots of different things have to come together for it to fall our way and there is a lot for us to work on.

Will you be able to adapt your philosophy and style of play during the tournament if necessary?
A style can evolve without having to change it or touch it. I proved that at Barcelona. We're going to continue with the same style, don't doubt that for a minute, but there will be nuances. Thanks to Luis Aragones [Spain's Euro 2008-winning coach], Spain found itself, who we are. We're talented players, not physically strong ones. We're clever and sharp.

How do you react to some of the criticism you have received in the past, particularly concerning your origins?
I am not going to talk about politics, but I think it's the first time that someone from Gijon has been accused [of not feeling Spanish]. They must not know who Pelayo was! I feel Gijones, Asturian, Spanish and also Catalan.

And what about your character?
I might not be the friendliest guy in the world, but I don't think that's important and I am close to my players; that's something I like to do. I would go and eat with any of you from the press, if you're paying – but make it an expensive restaurant! I am not someone to call players a lot. I called one, because it was a wrong number: Jesus Navas. I thought he was taking the Mick when I heard his voice! I said sorry, but it was nice to talk to him.
Sid Lowe

USA '94...Enrique's first international tournament

TACTICS

Tiki-taka with a twist

This is not tiki-taka any more, but nor is it *not* tiki-taka either. Luis Enrique has applied a twist to the identity that made Spain world and European champions rather than seeking to change it entirely. The *seleccion* still usually line up in a 4-3-3 formation, and may even do so with a false No.9, while the commitment to having the ball and pressing higher up the pitch remains.

And yet there has been an attempt to break from the predictable, academic approach that saw Spain knocked out of World Cup 2018 having completed 1,000 passes, and that fell early in Brazil and France prior to that. Indeed, that was part of the reason he was employed initially, driven by the idea that the way he had rethought Barcelona's identity could be applied to the national team too. He has sought to mix possession with pace, occasional directness and greater intent, more determination to go for the throat.

Luis Enrique has been keen to bring younger players into the side too. Expect something familiar, but expect one of the midfielders to break from the mould and break for the box, while at least one of the two wide men to be encouraged to run straight at defences.

Survivor...Sergio Ramos is the only remaining player from Euro 2008

Lynchpin...Rodri has replaced Sergio Busquets in midfield

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 4
v **Portugal**
(h, Seville)

San Mames...Athletic Bilbao's stadium

GROUP GAMES
Jun 14
v **Sweden**
(Bilbao)
Jun 19
v **Poland**
(Bilbao)
Jun 23
v **Slovakia**
(Bilbao)

THE VIEW FROM SPAIN

"This is a young national team with a good future but they may not be ready yet. Spain can beat anyone but they can be beaten by anyone too. You have to be almost perfect to win the tournament and Spain lack a bit of cohesion and experience. It would be a success to reach the semis."
Miguel Angel Diaz, Cadena Cope

"Spain are in the middle of a generational change after the 2018 World Cup. Luis Enrique has tried a lot of players – apart from Sergio Ramos there are virtually no guaranteed starters. Either the young players take a big step forward or it's hard to see them reaching the semis."
Rodrigo Errasti, Imago Sport

Pedigree... as Barcelona coach, Enrique won the treble in 2015

COACH

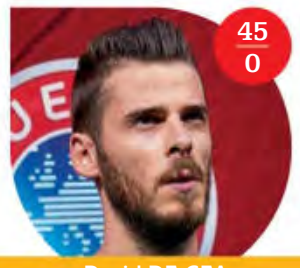
Luis ENRIQUE
Age 51 (08.05.70)
Appointed July 2018

There's something enjoyably provocative about Luis Enrique, a glint in his eye that suggests the hard edge is at least partly playful. Or perhaps he's just too honest to play the game the press wants to play. Not a man to suffer fools, single-minded and competitive, he erected a scaffold at Spain's Las Rozas HQ to get a better view of training, and has been swift to change players in his search for dynamism and edge to go with technical quality. Back in the job having been forced to temporarily leave his post following the tragic death of his nine-year-old daughter.

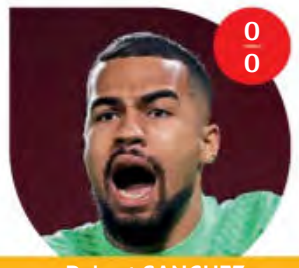
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

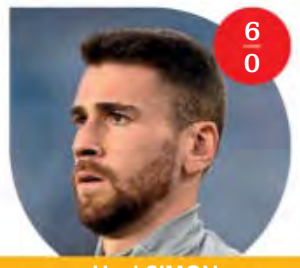
GOALKEEPERS



David DE GEA
Manchester United (Eng)
Age 30 (07.11.90)
De Gea has long felt unloved and unrespected in Spain, but has Luis Enrique's support despite losing the No.1 spot to Unai Simon.

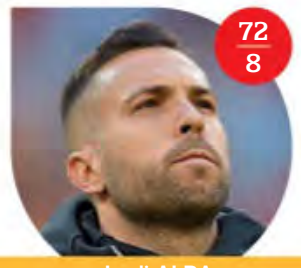


Robert SANCHEZ
Brighton & Hove Albion (Eng)
Age 23 (18.11.97)
An unknown to most Spanish fans when called up in March. Fighting for the third keeper's spot with Sergio Asenjo, Alex Remiro and Kepa Arrizabalaga.

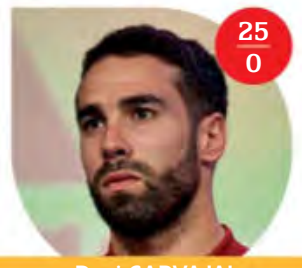


Unai SIMON
Athletic Bilbao
Age 23 (11.06.97)
Recalled by Athletic Bilbao 20 days into his loan spell at Elche after Kepa Arrizabalaga left for Chelsea and Alex Remiro refused to renew. Now Spain's No.1.

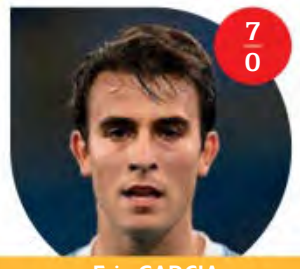
DEFENDERS



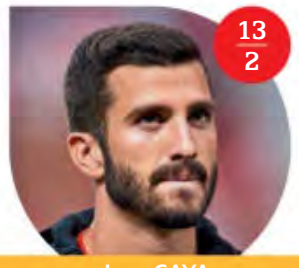
Jordi ALBA
Barcelona
Age 32 (21.03.89)
Chest out, head back, legs whirring, Jordi Alba is still whizzing up and down the left wing faster than anyone else. Had a good season for Barca.



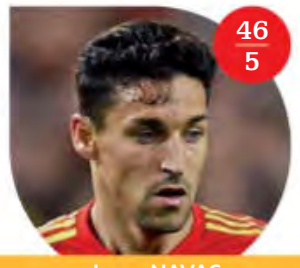
Dani CARVAJAL
Real Madrid
Age 29 (11.01.92)
Laid the first brick at Real Madrid's Valdebebas training ground, an all-round right-back with a bit of everything – including a competitive edge.



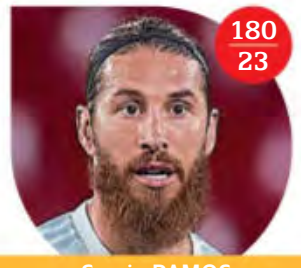
Eric GARCIA
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 20 (09.01.01)
Barcelona couldn't afford to buy him from Manchester City in the winter, but he should join in the summer. Started all three 2022 World Cup qualifiers in March.



Jose GAYA
Valencia
Age 25 (25.05.95)
The Valencia captain and homegrown talent. Another attacking left-back from the club that seems to have piles of them. Pushing Alba hard.



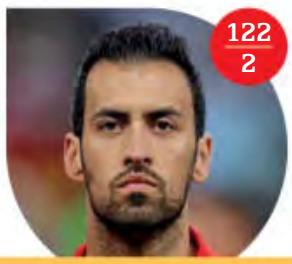
Jesus NAVAS
Sevilla
Age 35 (21.11.85)
"Fifteen minutes rest and he'll be fine," Luis Enrique said about the Sevilla captain, saying it all. A right-back now but as quick and tireless as ever.



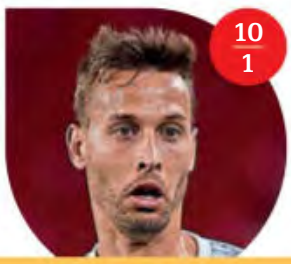
Sergio RAMOS
Real Madrid
Age 35 (30.03.86)
Captain, leader and on course to become the most-capped player in history. Not just with Spain, but with any country. Also in *La Roja*'s top ten all-time top scorers' list.

Pau TORRES
Villarreal
Age 24 (16.01.97)
Elegant, left-footed ball-playing centre-back watched carefully by the media and Spain's biggest teams – much to the irritation of his club coach Unai Emery.

MIDFIELDERS

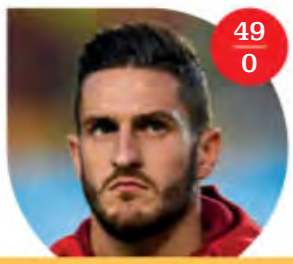


Sergio BUSQUETS
Barcelona
Age 32 (16.07.88)
"If I could be a footballer all over again, I would choose to be Sergio Busquets," said the former Spain coach Vicente del Bosque.

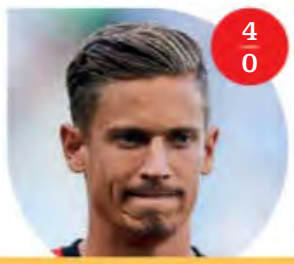


Sergio CANALES
Real Betis
Age 30 (16.02.91)
A lack of opportunity and injuries interrupted his early career but there's a maturity and control about him now that's even better than before.

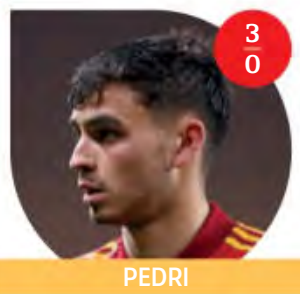
FABIAN Ruiz
Napoli (Ita)
Age 25 (03.04.96)
Playing in Italy has been good for Fabian, which isn't to say he won't return one day soon. Vision and touch, cut very much from the "Spanish" mould.



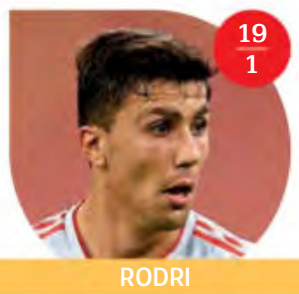
KOKE
Atletico Madrid
Age 29 (08.01.92)
Watching him play for Spain now poses just one question: did they really omit him for two years? Inspirational captain for Atletico where he's been his whole career.



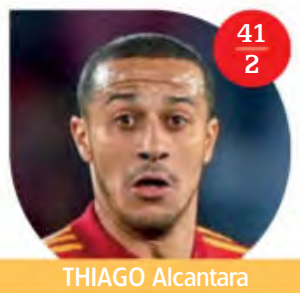
Marcos LLORENTE
Atletico Madrid
Age 26 (30.01.95)
Has a dog named Anfield (where he hit a brace to knock Liverpool out of the Champions League) and the legs to keep on running long after everyone else has given up.



PEDRI
Barcelona
Age 18 (25.11.02)
Says he plays as if he was in the garden with his brother and it looks that way. Calm, smooth and a total revelation this season for Barcelona.

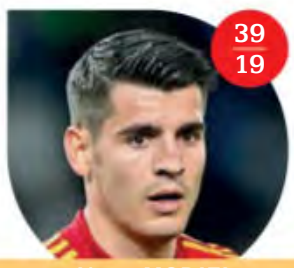


RODRI
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 24 (22.06.96)
Stands out by not standing out. Tall, quiet, sensible, nothing flash – and a very talented deep-lying midfielder. Now ahead of Sergio Busquets in the pecking order.



THIAGO Alcantara
Liverpool (Eng)
Age 30 (11.04.91)
Son of Brazilian World Cup winner Mazinho but raised in Spain, an aesthetically unique player with soft feet, impeccable technique and expert vision.

GERARD Moreno
Villarreal
Age 29 (07.04.92)
The outstanding Spanish striker in La Liga this season, dropping off the front to score goals and dictate the play at Villarreal.

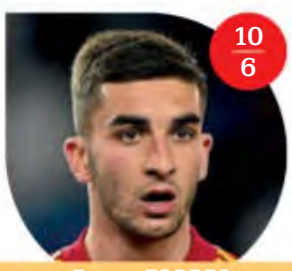


Alvaro MORATA
Juventus (Ita)
Age 28 (23.10.92)
There's a vulnerability about Morata, but there's plenty of talent too and the return to Juventus appears to have really benefited him.

FORWARDS

Dani OLMO
RB Leipzig (Ger)
Age 23 (07.05.98)
His career path, leaving Spain for Croatia and heading from there to RB Leipzig, was not the typical route to the national team. Former *La Masia* graduate.

Mikel OYARZABAL
Real Sociedad
Age 24 (21.04.97)
Quick, technical wide attacker who captains *La Real*. Has hit double figures for league goals for the last four seasons. Studied business at Deusto University.



Ferran TORRES
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 21 (29.02.00)
European champion at Under-17 and Under-19 level, long seen as the outstanding player of his generation. Scored a hat-trick in the 6-0 thrashing of Germany.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS KEPA Arrizabalaga (Chelsea, Eng)
DEFENDERS Raul ALBIOL (Villarreal), Marc CUCURELLA (Getafe), Mario HERMOSO (Atletico Madrid), Diego LLORENTE (Leeds United, Eng), Inigo MARTINEZ (Athletic Bilbao), Pedro PORRO (Sporting, Por), Sergio REGUILON (Tottenham Hotspur, Eng), Sergi ROBERTO (Barcelona)
MIDFIELDERS Mikel MERINO (Real Sociedad)
FORWARDS Marco ASENSIO (Real Madrid), Iago ASPAS (Celta Vigo), Ansu FATI (Barcelona), Bryan GIL (Elche), RODRIGO (Leeds United, Eng)

The second coming

Zlatan Ibrahimovic's return grabs the headlines, but Sweden still have a strong supporting cast

The return of God. This is how – in his own words, of course – Zlatan Ibrahimovic heralded his return to the Swedish national team five years after his official international retirement. And it is the same way the Swedish public welcomed the return of their greatest son; the whole country was in delirium.

But this was, more than anything else, an audacious move from coach Janne Andersson. He was the one to take over Sweden after a disappointing Euro 2016 display, taking a huge gamble. The year when Zlatan left the team, not many believed that this Swedish side would ever be capable of big things. However, the 58-year-old, who unexpectedly won the Swedish league title with underdogs IFK Norrkoping in 2015, introduced the system that helped Sweden return to the World Cup in 2018.

With no big stars at his disposal, Andersson focused on building a solid defensive side with team spirit as one of their strongest trump cards. This helped them qualify for their first World Cup since 2006 and reach the quarter-finals in Russia, as well as finish ahead of Russia and Turkey in their Nations League group in the 2018-19 campaign. Euro 2020 was supposed to be a peak of the generation and a chance for young prodigies like Dejan Kulusevski and Alexander Isak to thrive. However, everything changes with the return of Zlatan.

> With no big stars at his disposal, Andersson focused on building a solid defensive side…however, everything changes with the return of Zlatan Ibrahimovic

Andersson will now have to find a new balance between the perfect atmosphere of equality that this team had, and the Zlatan-centric side that it used to be with their legendary attacker in the XI. But, as he explained when Ibrahimovic's name appeared on the squad list, the 39-year-old striker is the best Sweden has, and he is in this team on merit. An incredible 15 goals in his first 16 league games for Milan this season, plus two assists, prove that, even at 39, he still has plenty to offer.

Comeback… Zlatan assisted Viktor Claesson on his first game back

The return of their talisman changes a lot, but the ambitions of this team remain the same. This will be Sweden's sixth straight European Championship and third major tournament in a row, and the goal is to make another step further in the competition. Finishing ahead of the highly-talented Norway and Romania in qualifying Group F, and some respectable performances in the Nations League's top division, seem like a promising sign that this team can achieve big things.

Whatever their chances were before, now that Ibrahimovic is back expectations are going to hit the roof. Because there is only one Swedish God of football, and his name is and will always be Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Sasa Ilic

JANNE ANDERSSON

Sweden had a splendid 2018 World Cup. What are your reflections on it?
I was very pleased with the way our team performed during the tournament. As a manager, there are always things and details that you want to improve, but it gives us a lot of confidence to know that we can perform against very good teams. In the quarter-final, we had a good performance against a very good team. We had a good game plan and followed it, so no regrets.

How does Sweden's 4-4-2 formation compare with other systems?
People who say that we play a strict 4-4-2 haven't been watching our games closely. Yes, in our defensive position, we start from a 4-4-2, but we play our offensive football in another way. All of our tactics have to do with the players that we have and the strengths and weaknesses of our opponents. In the modern game, you have to be flexible.

What does Manchester United's Victor Lindelof bring to the defence?
To me, Victor is one of the best defenders in the world. He has been instrumental for our team. Not only for his defensive skills, but also for his leadership qualities.

Main man...Zlatan is the Swedish centre of attention once again

How important is Sebastian Larsson?
Sebastian is a very professional player who always works hard for the team. He is also obsessed with winning. Sebastian played his first game for the national team a little over 13 years ago. He now has over 100 caps for Sweden. Of course, that kind of experience is really important. His professionalism and determination rubs off on the young players.

Why do you think Alexander Isak has flourished at Real Sociedad?
Three things: his talent, his mind and his determination. He has a single focus and that is getting better everyday. It has paid off so far and I think it will continue to do so. Hopefully, he will continue on the path he is on right now and be an important part of our team for many years to come.

The draw for Euro 2020 sees you paired with Spain, Slovakia and Poland. What are your thoughts on the group?
In the Euros, I don't think there is such a thing as an easy draw. All we can do is focus on how to make our preparation as good as possible. We have played against Spain during qualification and they have a very good team. Poland have qualified for all the big tournaments for some time and Slovakia can't be underestimated.

Re-match...Marcus Berg scored in a 1-1 draw with Spain during qualifying

How do you seek to stop Spain's possession football and Poland striker Robert Lewandowski?
Like I said, both Spain and Poland are very good teams, but we know from playing against Spain in qualifying that if we perform to our best we have a fair chance. We don't focus on particular players. Poland have a very good team with players that are playing at the highest level in Europe.

Samindra Kunti

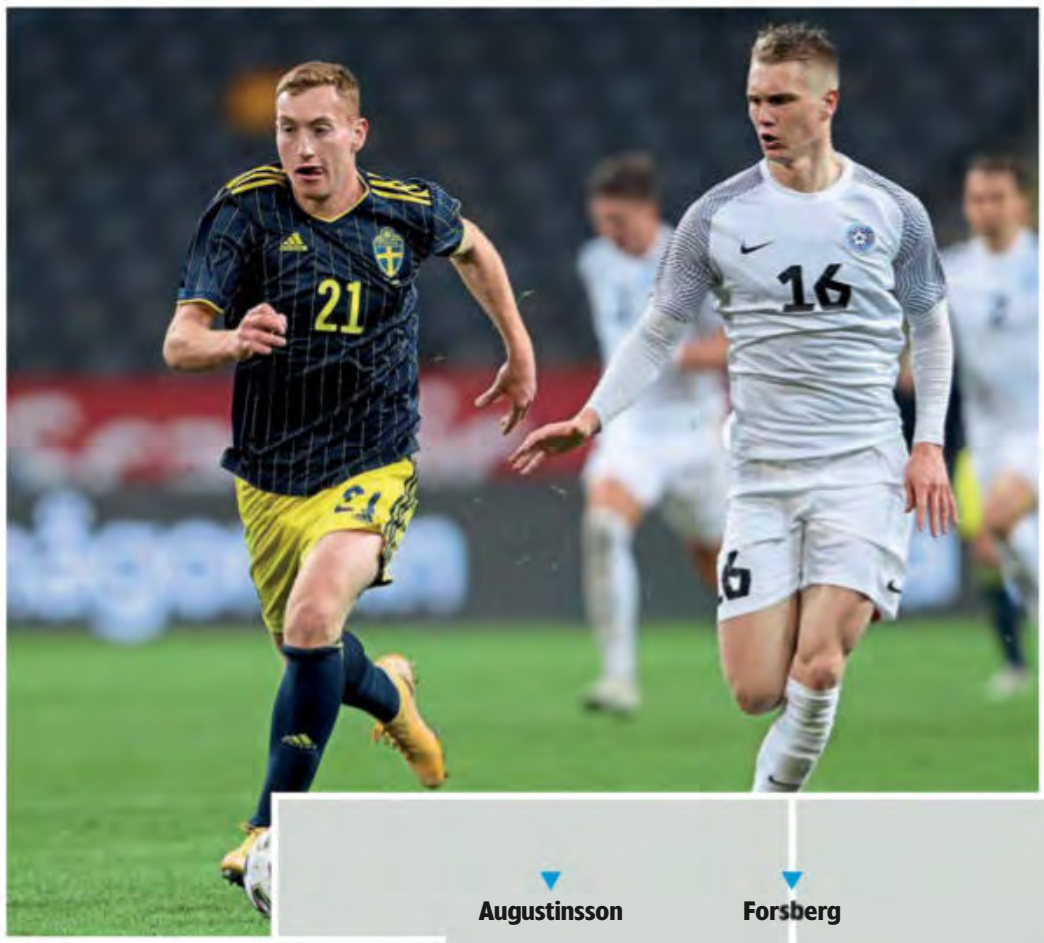
TACTICS

Classic 4-4-2

The history of Swedish football still fondly remembers the days of Bob Houghton and Roy Hodgson. They introduced a well-disciplined and aggressive 4-4-2 system that became highly successful, but also a part of Swedish football culture. Janne Andersson is another coach who mainly deploys this formation. Aware of his side's limitations, Andersson cannot rely too much on individuals, but the strength of teamwork and discipline.

Defensive organisation and shape are essential, with everyone having their bit of defensive responsibility, especially now that the back four is uncertain. The focus is on maintaining a compact shape at all times. When in possession, Sweden are very direct, with long and high balls being an important part of their attacking plan. Of course, there is more to it than that, with Albin Ekdal and Kristoffer Olsson also being able to create from the middle.

The addition of Ibrahimovic to a highly potent attack could be crucial. It will be interesting to see who Andersson prefers to pair with Zlatan – young gun striker Alexandar Isak, veteran forward Marcus Berg or Juventus' Dejan Kulusevski, who usually lines up on the wing. It would not be a surprise to see him experimenting.



Talent...Dejan Kulusevski

Hot-shot... Alexander Isak

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
May 29
v **Finland**
(h, Solna)
Jun 5
v **Armenia**
(h, Solna)

Dublin...Sweden last played in the Irish capital en route to World Cup 2014

GROUP GAMES
Jun 14
v **Spain**
(Bilbao)
Jun 18
v **Slovakia**
(Dublin)
Jun 23
v **Poland**
(Dublin)

THE VIEW FROM SWEDEN

"Offensively I think Sweden are as good as they've ever been. With players like Isak and Kulusevski, and now Zlatan, which is a topic for perhaps a novel. The main thing is who will play defensively. Sweden have a good chance in two of their three group games and that's more than enough to secure qualification."

Anton Zetterman, Fotbolldirekt.se

"With the return of Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Sweden dare to dream like we haven't done for a generation. Reaching the quarter-finals of the World Cup seemed like the ceiling for Janne Andersson, but with Ibrahimovic back and young guns emerging, nothing feels impossible."

Erik Niva, TV pundit

Andersson... at the 2018 World Cup

COACH

Janne ANDERSSON
Age 58 (29.09.62)
Appointed August 2016

Andersson took over the *Blagult* after Sweden's disappointing Euro 2016. His pragmatic approach to football changed the perception of the team radically and Sweden qualified for their second major tournament in a row under his guidance.

Before taking charge of the national team, Andersson spent five years with IFK Norrkoping where he became renown as a miracle maker. In 2014 his side was involved in a relegation battle, but a year later, and with no significant changes to the squad, they won their first league title in 26 years.

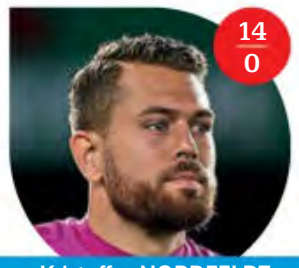
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

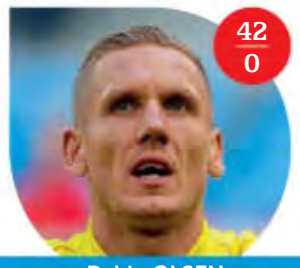
GOALKEEPERS

9 / 0

Karl-Johan JOHNSSON
Copenhagen (Den)
Age 31 (28.01.90)
A full international for the Sweden national team since 2012, he was a squad player for his country at the 2018 World Cup. Has great reflexes.

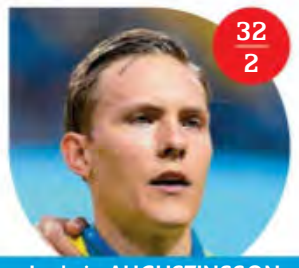

14 / 0

Kristoffer NORDFELDT
Genclerbirligi (Tur)
Age 31 (23.06.89)
Another experienced keeper and fine shot-stopper. Started both World Cup qualifiers in March, and regular club football could give him the edge.

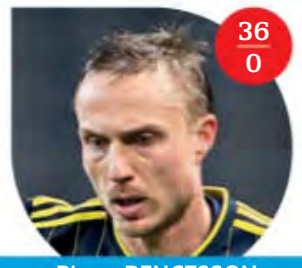

42 / 0

Robin OLSEN
Everton (Eng)
Age 31 (08.01.90)
Old-fashioned keeper, huge experience playing in the top leagues and long-term Sweden No.1. However, limited game-time with Everton.

DEFENDERS


32 / 2

Ludwig AUGUSTINSSON
Werder Bremen (Ger)
Age 27 (21.04.94)
Agile and intensely competitive left-back whose crosses can be extremely dangerous. A more attacking option than Bengtsson.


36 / 0

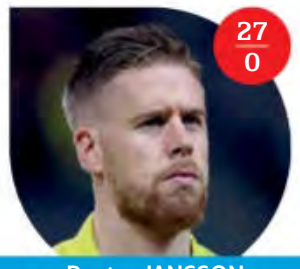
Pierre BENGTSSON
Vejle (Den)
Age 33 (12.04.88)
Tactically disciplined and experienced left-back who's spent most of his club career playing for Scandinavian teams. On loan from Copenhagen.

88 / 9

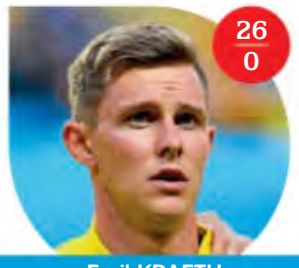
Andreas GRANQVIST
Helsingborg
Age 36 (16.04.85)
Granite-like centre-back and captain with vast experience, but hit by injuries recently. Likely to be included for what he offers as a personality and leader.

15 / 0

Filip HELANDER
Rangers (Sco)
Age 28 (22.04.93)
A product of the U21 generation that won the Euros in 2015 and a centre-back who takes no risks. Could start with concerns over Granqvist and Jansson.


27 / 0

Pontus JANSSON
Brentford (Eng)
Age 30 (13.02.91)
A regular during the 2020-21 Nations League, but recovering from ankle surgery. Marcus Danielson, Joakim Nilsson or Carl Starfelt wait in the wings.

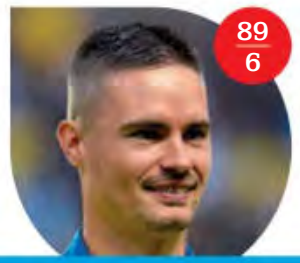

26 / 0

Emil KRAFTH
Newcastle United (Eng)
Age 26 (02.08.94)
Solid right-back, very good going forward and has excellent tactical awareness. Mixed season at Newcastle, likely to be back-up to Lustig.

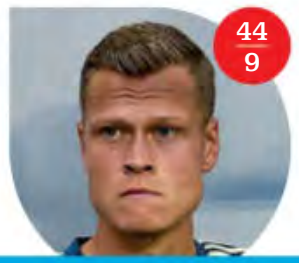
40 / 3

Victor LINDELOF
Manchester United (Eng)
Age 26 (17.07.94)
Commanding centre-back who keeps the Swedish back-line solid. One of the best central defenders the country has ever produced.

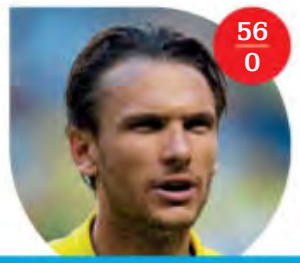
MIDFIELDERS


89 / 6

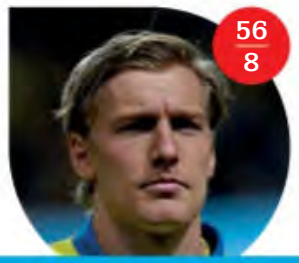
Mikael LUSTIG
AIK
Age 34 (13.12.86)
Former Celtic right-back who played almost 300 games for the Scottish giants. Returned to his homeland last summer and has found a new lease of life.


44 / 9

Viktor CLAESSON
Krasnodar (Rus)
Age 29 (02.01.92)
Dangerous attacking midfielder. Made his Sweden debut in 2012 and is often deployed on either wing. Set-piece specialist.


56 / 0

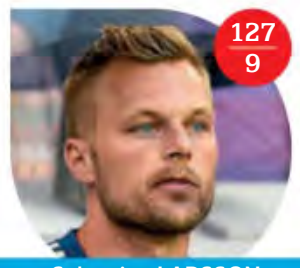
Albin EKDAL
Sampdoria (Ita)
Age 31 (28.07.89)
An intelligent link-man and one of the most important players in this side. Has a great understanding with Kristoffer Olsson in the middle.


56 / 8

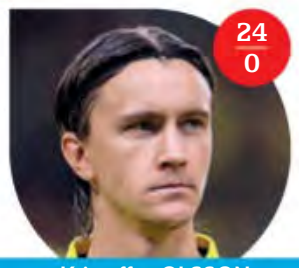
Emil FORSBERG
RB Leipzig (Ger)
Age 29 (23.10.91)
Deployed mainly on the left side of midfield, but can also be used as a No.10 behind the strikers. Offers a real goal threat in the opposition penalty area.

11 / 1

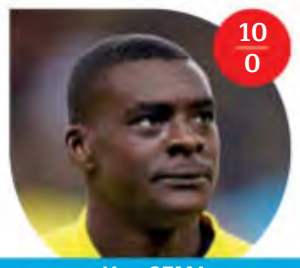
Dejan KULUSEVSKI
Juventus (Ita)
Age 21 (25.04.00)
Probably the hottest young player in the Swedish game. He can play alongside Ibrahimovic up front, but is also useful on the right flank of midfield.


127 / 9

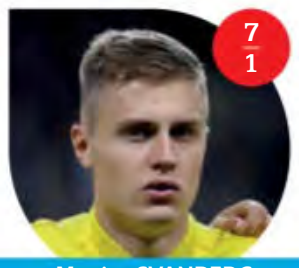
Sebastian LARSSON
AIK
Age 35 (06.06.85)
Sweden's fifth-most capped player of all time. The free-kick expert has played for Arsenal, Birmingham City, Sunderland and Hull City in England.


24 / 0

Kristoffer OLSSON
Krasnodar (Rus)
Age 25 (30.06.95)
Bounced back after he broke his leg in his first training session with the national team in 2015. Now one of Sweden's most crucial players in midfield.

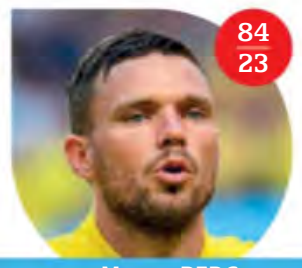

10 / 0

Ken SEMA
Watford (Eng)
Age 27 (30.09.93)
An important part of the Olympic team that played in Rio de Janeiro, he is still waiting for his big break to come. Able to play on either flank.


7 / 1

Mattias SVANBERG
Bologna (Ita)
Age 22 (05.01.99)
Scored on his debut for Sweden in 2019, rising star Svanberg is one of the young guns that Janne Andersson can count on to deliver the goods.

FORWARDS


84 / 23

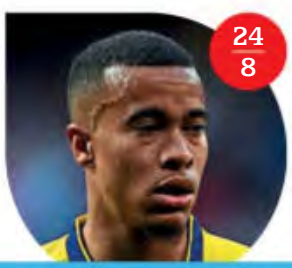
Marcus BERG
Krasnodar (Rus)
Age 34 (17.08.86)
Returned to Europe from Al Ain to become another of the Swedish contingent at Krasnodar, and has proven he still has what it takes.

118 / 62

Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC
Milan (Ita)
Age 39 (03.10.81)
Officially the oldest-ever footballer to play for Sweden. The country's record goalscorer will change the dynamics, but improve Andersson's options.

20 / 6

Alexander ISAK
Real Sociedad (Spa)
Age 21 (21.09.99)
Became the youngest-ever player to score for Sweden in 2017. Talented prodigy and the future of this team. Has been in blistering form since 2019.


24 / 8

Robin QUAISON
Mainz (Ger)
Age 27 (09.10.93)
Probably the fourth-choice selection up front. Will have big competition for the spot, but his goal record trumps rivals John Guidetti and Isaac Kiese Thelin.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Marko JOHANSSON (Malmo), Isak PETTERSSON (Toulouse, Fra), Jacob RINNE (Aalborg, Den)
DEFENDERS Marcus DANIELSON (Dalian Pro, Chn), Joakim NILSSON (Arminia Bielefeld, Ger), Martin OLSSON (Hacken), Carl STARFELT (Rubin Kazan, Rus)
MIDFIELDERS Jens CAJUSTE (Midtjylland, Den), Oscar HILJEMARK (Aalborg, Den), Jesper KARLSSON (AZ, Ned)
FORWARDS Sebastian ANDERSSON (Cologne, Ger), John GUIDETTI (Alaves, Spa), Isaac KIESE THELIN (Kasimpasa, Tur), Jordan LARSSON (Spartak Moscow, Rus)

Taking the next step

Can Switzerland win their first knockout round match at a major tournament since 1938?

Switzerland has stood out over the last decade or so as a small country that has done pretty much everything right in football terms. It has an enviable youth development system and has proved adept at harnessing the talent of the country's second-generation immigrants, who have given the national side a real spark and cutting edge.

Yet, the national team go into the Euro 2020 tournament showing signs of stagnation. Having become regulars at major tournaments, they have found themselves unable to break the round of 16 barrier, falling at that stage on their last three outings – the last two World Cups and Euro 2016.

The last World Cup was an excellent chance to take that next step when they faced a very average Sweden in the last 16, yet instead they went out with a whimper. Their performance, devoid of passion or inspiration, was on a par with the infamous 0-0 draw with Ukraine in 2006, regarded as one of the worst World Cup matches in living memory.

So, it is a familiar story going into Euro 2020 – a team full of talent and experience, high expectations and a coach who wants them to face the top sides as equals, yet surrounded by doubts over whether they have the special ingredient needed to get them to the quarter-finals or beyond.

Switzerland have been partly victims of their own success in producing players. The best (and some average) ones quickly become too big for the Swiss Super League and move abroad, yet in many cases the move proves premature and they end up as reserves or being shunted to a smaller team. Xherdan Shaqiri, who has suffered extended periods on the bench at Bayern Munich, Internazionale and Liverpool, is a prime example.

Although the coronavirus pandemic has made it hard to gauge their progress since 2018, there have been promising signs. The high point was the 5-2 win over Belgium that took them to the Nations League final four in 2019. They sailed through their Euro qualifying group, losing only one game, and drew twice with Germany and once with Spain in the Nations League last year. Another encouraging sign is that most of their players – with the exception of Shaqiri – are playing regularly.

Apart from the 1934 and 1938 World Cups, Switzerland have never won a knockout match at a major tournament. If coach Vladimir Petkovic wants to prove that his team are no longer "Little Switzerland", as he said after the 2014 World Cup, this would be the perfect moment to break their duck.

Brian Homewood

Frustrated... Xherdan Shaqiri has struggled for game time at Liverpool

> Apart from the 1934 and 1938 World Cups, Switzerland have never won a knockout match at a major tournament...this would be the perfect moment to break their duck

VLADIMIR PETKOVIC

How do you reflect on Switzerland's elimination at the 2018 World Cup?
We played a good tournament up to that point and were in good shape. The penultimate group game cost us a lot of mental strength, which we lacked in the last 16. For such games, everyone has to be mentally and physically 100 per cent ready and focused. Like mountain climbing – the higher you go, the thinner the air, and the stronger you have to be.

In general, how would you describe your coaching philosophy?
I want us to always play our game, characterised by a relatively high press. We don't adapt to the opponent; we have our own plan. But we always do this with the necessary respect for the opponent.

You defeated Belgium 5-2 in the first Nations League. Does this give you belief that you can beat the big teams?
We also showed against Spain and Germany that we don't hide from "big" opponents. We always want to win – against every opponent. At the same time, we are also realistic and know that we have to perform 120 per cent against these top nations

Threat...Haris Seferovic celebrates his goal against Bulgaria in World Cup qualifying

in order to win. In the first game against Belgium, we gave it 100 per cent and lost. In the second when we won, we had to give more than 100 per cent.

Kevin Mbabu has been a revelation. What does he bring to your XI?
He is a modern outside player with a lot of speed and an urge to move forward. He is also dangerous in front of goal. The most important thing is that he is 100 per cent ready physically and mentally.

How frustrating has Xherdan Shaqiri's lack of match fitness been?
The last time we were together he showed that you can count on him at any time, even if he doesn't always play for his club. Like any player, Xherdan needs playing time, security and a good physical condition to help us. His creativity is a great enrichment for any team.

Your team doesn't score goals easily. Does that worry you?
We create a lot of chances in every game and many players were involved in goals. We have to be constantly more hands-on in the final third. Against Spain and Germany we showed we can do it.

How do you assess Group A?
It is a very strong group in which a lot is possible. Italy are the favourites. They play at home and have not lost a game in almost two years. Wales and Turkey are difficult opponents with some stars. In Baku, Turkey will almost be at home.

Experienced... Petkovic speaking to his players during a training session in Brussels in 2018

Can you break the glass ceiling at Euro 2020?
You can't predict something like that. There are no easy opponents. For Switzerland it is always a success to be part of a tournament and more so if you progress.

Samindra Kunti

TACTICS

Settled system

Switzerland play with a three-man defence, a system which has long been favoured by manager Vladimir Petkovic throughout his career. The Bosnia-born coach initially stuck by the 4-2-3-1 system he inherited from Ottmar Hitzfeld when he took over following the 2014 World Cup, but more recently has introduced his own system.

It seems suited to his current line-up. Manuel Akanji has improved enormously in his distribution from the back, Fabian Schar is an excellent exponent of the long ball out of defence and Nico Elvedi has experience of playing in a three-man defence at Borussia Monchengladbach.

The midfield varies between four and five men, although in both cases it revolves around Granit Xhaka's passing. The Arsenal player is usually positioned in front of the defence, almost in the role of the deep-lying playmaker, although sometimes he is moved to the left of a four-man midfield as an attacker.

If Xherdan Shaqiri is playing, he usually fits in between a four-man midfield and a two-man attack. If not, Petkovic often opts for three players in the front-line, spearheaded by the somewhat erratic Haris Seferovic and the powerful but less prolific Breel Embolo.

Influential...Granit Xhaka (middle) is a crucial component of the midfield

Erratic...Haris Seferovic is likely to lead the line

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
May 30
v **USA**
(h, St. Gallen)
Jun 3 v
Liechtenstein
(h, St. Gallen)

Powerful... striker Breel Embolo is one of Switzerland's key men

GROUP GAMES
Jun 12
v **Wales**
(Baku)
Jun 16
v **Italy**
(Rome)
Jun 20
v **Turkey**
(Baku)

THE VIEW FROM SWITZERLAND

"Everything is possible with this team. Switzerland have a squad that can beat nearly everyone on their day and a coach that knows his tactics. But the main question is whether key players will turn up in good form. One of them is Xherdan Shaqiri. Will he be in good shape to bring in his extra quality?"

Steven Krucker, journalist at SRF Sport

"Since the World Cup, Petkovic has imposed a new system designed to maximise the qualities of his best players and dominate games. Euro 2020 will be a strong test of this ambition. Xhaka dictates the tempo, Shaqiri brings the spark and this team have the ambition."

David Lemos, presenter at RTS

Experienced... Petkovic

COACH

Vladimir PETKOVIC (BiH)
Age 57 (15.08.63)
Appointed July 2014

Born in present-day Bosnia, Vladimir Petkovic, is now in his seventh year as Switzerland coach. During his early coaching days, spent in the Swiss lower divisions, he also worked part-time in a Caritas charity shop. He made his mark by taking Young Boys to two successive second-place finishes in the league.

After stints with Samsunspor and Sion, he joined Lazio where he won the Coppa Italia in his first season. But he angered president Claudio Lotito by announcing he would coach Switzerland once his contract expired and was duly sacked.

18+

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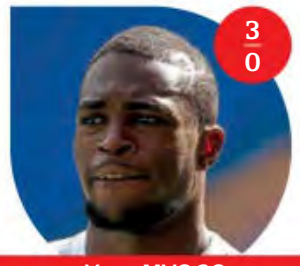
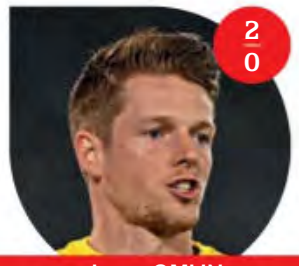
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS



Yvon MVOGO
PSV (Ned)
Age 26 (06.06.94)
Cameroon-born, he spent three years as second-choice goalkeeper at RB Leipzig but is now a regular on loan at PSV in the Eredivisie.

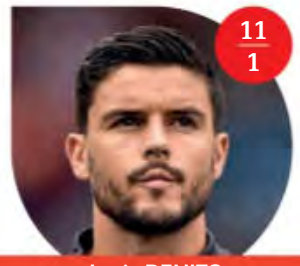


Jonas OMLIN
Montpellier (Fra)
Age 27 (10.01.94)
Third-choice goalkeeper, he made his debut at the age of 26 in a friendly against Croatia last year. Montpellier's No.1 this season.

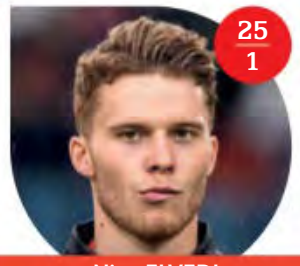
Yann SOMMER
Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger)
Age 32 (17.12.88)
Switzerland's first-choice goalkeeper since the 2014 World Cup. Has excellent reflexes, calm and self-assured, and averse to risk-taking.

DEFENDERS

Manuel AKANJI
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Age 25 (19.07.95)
All-round defender, comfortable on either foot and at his best when bringing the ball out of from central defence. Very reliable.



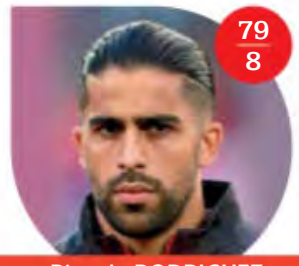
Loris BENITO
Bordeaux (Fra)
Age 29 (07.01.92)
Left-back who was called up once in 2014 but had to wait another four years for his international debut after suffering a knee injury.



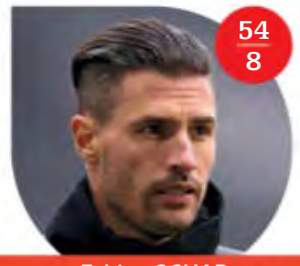
Nico ELVEDI
Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger)
Age 24 (30.09.96)
Composed and assured on the ball, Zurich-born Elvedi can play as a central defender or as a full-back. Has become a regular since the 2018 World Cup.

Kevin MBABU
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 26 (19.04.95)
After a difficult start to his career at Newcastle United where he was plagued by injury, he flourished at Young Boys and now at Wolfsburg.

Becir OMERAGIC
Zurich
Age 19 (20.01.02)
The centre-back made an instant impression in his first full season with Zurich and made three Switzerland appearances before his 19th birthday.



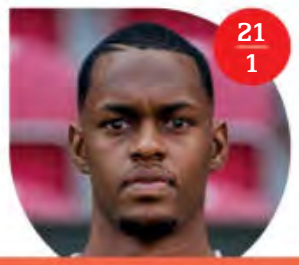
Ricardo RODRIGUEZ
Torino (Ita)
Age 28 (25.08.92)
Left-back Rodriguez provides a plentiful supply of crosses and free-kicks but has not quite lived up to his early promise. Was also eligible for Chile and Spain.



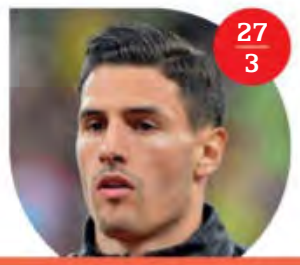
Fabian SCHAR
Newcastle United (Eng)
Age 29 (20.12.91)
Worked as a bank intern until he burst onto the scene with Basle in 2012. Complements good long-range passing with a powerful free-kick. Immensely strong.

MIDFIELDERS

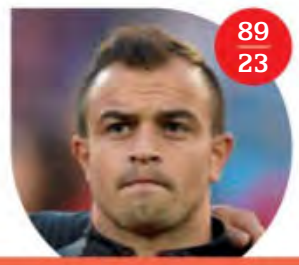
Silvan WIDMER
Basle
Age 28 (05.03.93)
Despite first being called up in 2014 and having five years' of Serie A experience with Udinese, he has been used sparingly by his nation.



Edimilson FERNANDES
Mainz (Ger)
Age 25 (15.04.96)
Lanky, box-to-box midfielder of Cape Verdean descent. Struggled to establish himself at West Ham United but has fared better at Mainz.



Remo FREULER
Atalanta (Ita)
Age 29 (15.04.92)
Calm on the ball, Freuler has been a key part of Atalanta's remarkable rise over the last few seasons, although he is still not a regular for his country.



Xherdan SHAQIRI
Liverpool (Eng)
Age 29 (10.10.91)
Initially billed as the "Alpine Messi", Kosovan-born Shaqiri is a threat with his long-range shooting and clever passing. A bench warmer this season.

Djibril SOW
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
Age 24 (06.02.97)
He got off to a false start by joining Monchengladbach prematurely, before making a name by helping Young Boys end a 32-year wait for the title.

Ruben VARGAS
Augsburg (Ger)
Age 22 (05.08.98)
A diminutive, creative winger with pace, panache and a low centre of gravity. Born in Switzerland, his father is from the Dominican Republic.

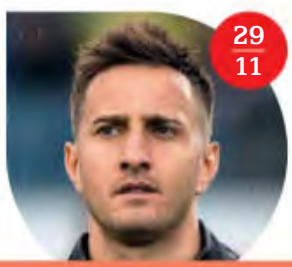
Granit XHAKA
Arsenal (Eng)
Age 28 (27.09.92)
The team captain, his passing keeps the midfield ticking. His tackling leaves a lot to be desired and is prone to moments of rashness.

Denis ZAKARIA
Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger)
Age 24 (20.11.96)
Defensive midfielder who started every game during the Euro qualifying campaign. Born in Geneva to a Congolese father and a South Sudanese mother.

Steven ZUBER
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
Age 29 (17.08.91)
Left-sided attacking midfielder, he was a regular in 2018 and scored against Brazil at the 2018 World Cup. Back in the side after last year's foot injury.

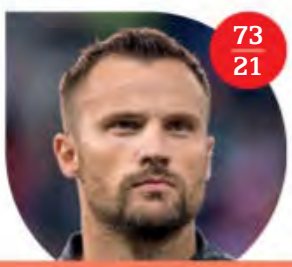
FORWARDS

Breel EMBOLO
Borussia M'gladbach (Ger)
Age 24 (14.02.97)
Powerful and technically-gifted Cameroon-born forward. Made his pro debut aged 17, but his career has been plagued by injuries.



Mario GAVRANOVIC
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)
Age 31 (24.11.89)
Well-travelled striker who has played for several clubs in Switzerland, Germany and Croatia. Been in and out of the squad during his career.

Admir MEHMEDI
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Age 30 (16.03.91)
Second striker who has been part of the set-up for the best part of a decade, although he missed the 2018 World Cup with a serious foot injury.



HARIS SEFEROVIC
Benfica (Por)
Age 29 (22.02.92)
Despite lots of ups and downs at club level and squandering too many chances for comfort, he has established himself as Switzerland's main striker.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Gregor KOBEL (Stuttgart, Ger)
DEFENDERS Eray COMERT (Basle), Michael LANG (Borussia Monchengladbach, Ger), Jordan LOTOMBA (Nice, Fra)
MIDFIELDERS Michel AEBISCHER (Young Boys), Christian FASSNACHT (Young Boys), Pajtim KASAMI (Basle), Simon SOHM (Parma, Ita), Renato STEFFEN (Wolfsburg, Ger)
FORWARDS Albian AJETI (Celtic, Sco), Cedric ITTEN (Rangers, Sco)

Another golden generation

No team let in fewer goals in qualifying

After an impressive qualification campaign, Turkey ended up being decimated by injuries to key players. They say every cloud has a silver lining. Well, for the Turkish national team, the pandemic could not really have come at a better time. Several star players including Merih Demiral, Ozan Kabak, Yusuf Yazici and Cenk Tosun were all sidelined heading into the tournament last summer. All four have since recovered. And with the exception of Tosun, they have excelled this season. Yazici has shone at Lille, Kabak earned himself a high-profile move to Liverpool and Demiral is a starting centre-back at Juventus.

Speaking of the defence, that happens to be this team's strength. Many Turkish supporters in the past will remember hiding behind the sofa watching the national team trying to defend. It was excruciating to watch. Suffice to say, the Crescent Stars' Achilles heel had always been at the back. Which makes this side all the more remarkable. No team in qualifying let in fewer goals than Turkey's three. In fact, they managed to keep eight clean sheets – and this was a group that included reigning world champions France, who Turkey managed to take four points off.

> There is no denying that this side has a lot of potential

Boasting the likes of Leicester City's Caglar Soyuncu, Demiral, Kabak and Lille right-back Mehmet Zeki Celik, this is the strongest defence Turkey have ever had. The defence has never been stronger, but this team does not have the attacking flair that previous Turkish sides were blessed with. They are not totally toothless – Burak Yilmaz has been scoring goals for fun at Lille, as has Yazici, and then there is Milan attacking midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu and Leicester City loanee Cengiz Under. Still, there is less creativity here than the teams of the past.

Star...Hakan Calhanoglu is a crucial player for Turkey

Nevertheless, it looks like another golden generation, on paper at least. There is no denying that this side has a lot of potential. Turkey did not do particularly well in the Nations League or recent friendlies, but coach Senol Gunes was clearly experimenting with his team selection, trying out new tactics. Their pre-tournament friendlies will offer a better final picture of what shape they are in before Euro 2020 kicks off, and whether they can live up to their billing as potential dark horses. And in Senol Gunes, they are led by a man who knows all about causing an upset: he was in charge when Turkey finished third at the 2002 World Cup, and returned in 2019 for his second spell in charge.

Emre Sarigul

SENOL GUNES

How proud will you be to lead Turkey at the European Championship this summer?
When we took office, we had the goal of participating at Euro 2020. We have no negativity there. We have created a squad that everyone likes and can count on. We made our planning, especially the camp sites and warm-up matches, but unfortunately we had to cancel them due to the pandemic. We had injuries and it was good to recover.

What are Turkey's chances in Group A?
If we want to rise, we need to get out of this group ahead of Italy, Switzerland and Wales. Our competitors should be considered strong, but we have to level up. We were in the 30s in the FIFA rankings – we must gain momentum and increase our ranking to the 20s and 10s.

Did defeating the Netherlands in March show that you can compete with the best?
We played well, but is it good enough? We need to be better. We have made a lot of ground when it comes to our defensive understanding. We have to do even better.

How will you select your squad?
This team is a team owned by Turkey. Changes will surely happen. Our door

Potential...Turkey celebrate after scoring against Latvia in a World Cup qualifier

is open to everyone. A future player must surpass a selected player. We follow them all. Those who are not taken should respectfully wait, work, and we will look when the time comes. There will be competition, but it will be for the success of the team. When we make a choice, we look at positions, not clubs. Successes in the national team create excitement and push future generations to work harder. I am proud of my players.

You seem to have a good mix of young and experienced squad members...
They know each other. They give us hope with the games they play. They have a European Championship to go up a level, and they also have the chance to show themselves again by participating in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers. We have a chance to promote football, to represent Turkish football again. That's why our responsibilities are high. We want to leave a mark. If we can achieve these results with this young generation, then it will be easier after that. The group that understands this will carry the team for ten years.

What is the long-term future?
This team is just starting. They are still developing. The European Championship will be a test and I want the World Cup for them. For future generations, we have to produce more talented players to make this permanent. We have the power to overcome this. We want to create a new vision.

How would you describe Burak Yilmaz?
A single word to describe him is not possible! He's got a story, a story that should be written. This story, if we write it, Turkey wins. It is very difficult to describe him with one word. But I do not want to be raving about him!

Samindra Kunti

Respected...Gunes celebrates with Burak Yilmaz

TACTICS

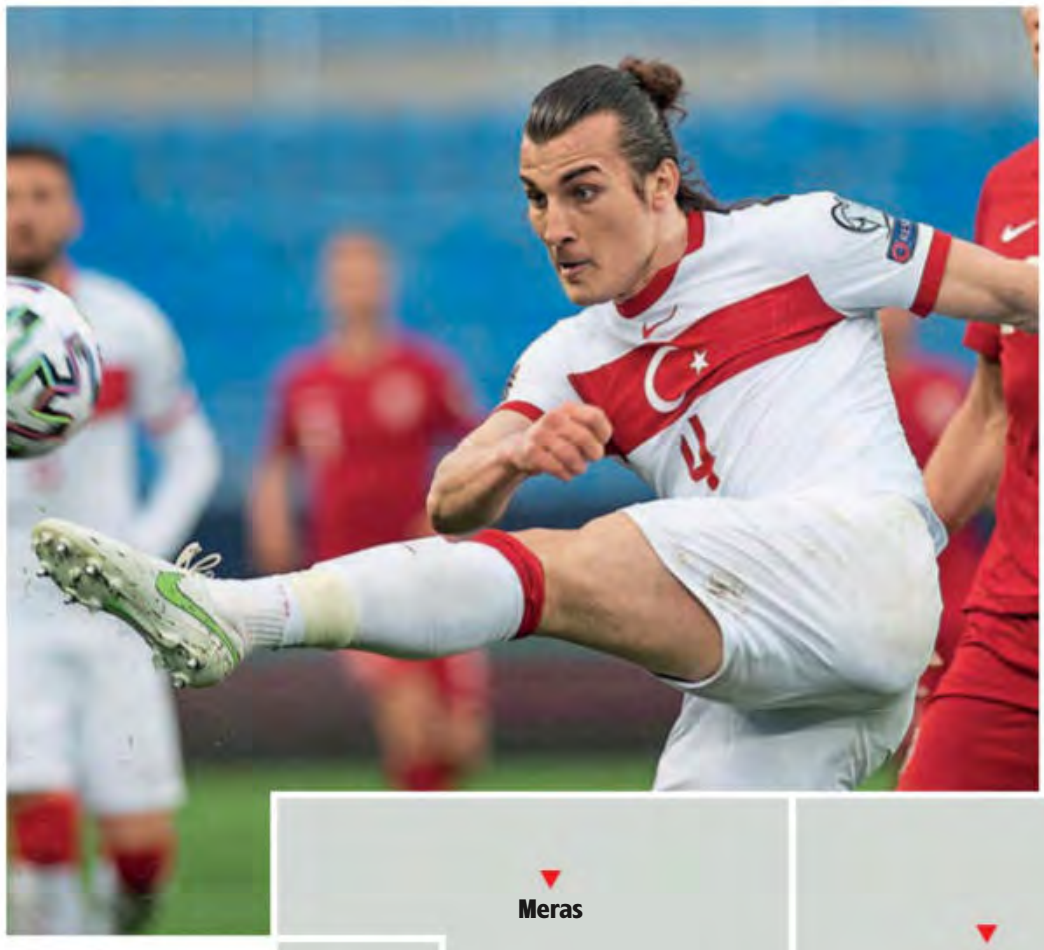
Defensively solid

Senol Gunes is better known for an attacking style of football. But he has managed to build a team with a stellar defensive record in his second stint in charge of Turkey. Gunes typically prefers a 4-2-3-1 set-up but is pragmatic and will shift his formation and tactics depending on the opposition.

The onus of this side is on defence, where Gunes is spoilt for choice. The defensive set-up will be a choice of Merih Demiral, Caglar Soyuncu or Ozan Kabak at centre-back. Zeki Celik will be at right-back, but the left side is still up for grabs.

In front of them, Gunes has opted for hard-working central midfielders to sit in front of the back four. Okay Yokuslu and Ozan Tufan fit the bill, with the former sitting back, allowing Tufan to carry out box-to-box duties.

In attack is where Gunes still has work to do in figuring out his best course. Yusuf Yazici has been outstanding for Lille but hasn't been able to replicate that talent for Turkey yet. Hakan Calhanoglu, Cengiz Under and Kenan Karaman are also available. Under has not been at his best this term but offers much-needed pace and explosiveness in attack, so do not be surprised to see him feature. Up front, Burak Yilmaz will lead the line.



Solid...Caglar Soyuncu is rock solid in defence

Explosive...Cengiz Under offers Turkey something different

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
May 27
v **Azerbaijan**
(h, Alanya)
May 31
v **Northern Ireland**
(h, Alanya)

Impressing...defender Ozan Kabak joined Liverpool in January

GROUP GAMES
Jun 11
v Italy
(Rome)
Jun 16
v Wales
(Baku)
Jun 20
v Switzerland
(Baku)

THE VIEW FROM TURKEY

"Turkey has a top-class defence. Undoubtedly Italy are the toughest opposition but, interestingly, Turkey did better against stronger opponents in qualification, mainly due to having such a tough defence. I think we have a really good chance of making it out of the group in second place."

Yakup Cinar, Fanatik newspaper

"I don't think I can remember this many Turkish players at top clubs in Europe's top five leagues. This is having a really positive effect on the Turkish national team. We have all the ingredients now, I don't see anything holding them back moving forward."

Necati Mete, Deplase magazine consultant

Pragmatic... Senol Gunes

COACH

Senol GUNES
Age 68 (01.06.52)
Appointed February 2019

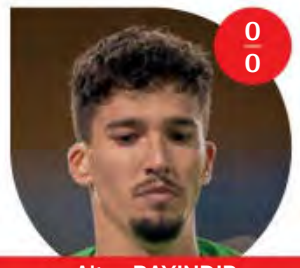
The last time Senol Gunes was coach of Turkey, he guided them to third place at the 2002 World Cup. An unprecedented achievement. He is undoubtedly one of the greatest managers in Turkish history.

Where he really excels though is in knockout tournaments. A brilliant tactical mind and a great motivator; Gunes has a knack for building a strong team spirit and getting his teams to exceed expectations. At Besiktas he managed to get his side to qualify as 2017-18 Champions League Group G winners – a first for a Super Lig side.

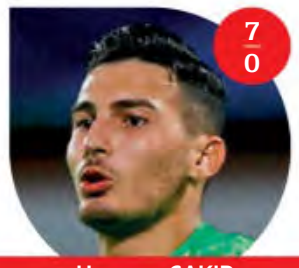
THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

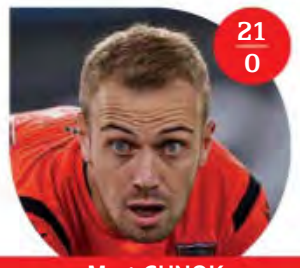
GOALKEEPERS



Altay BAYINDIR
Fenerbahce
Age 23 (14.04.88)
The baby of the goalkeeping group. Has excelled as first-choice custodian for Fener, showing excellent maturity for such a young goalkeeper.

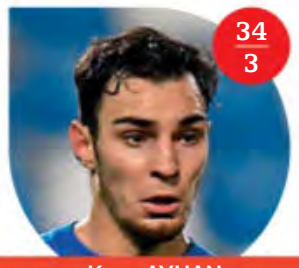


Ugurcan CAKIR
Trabzonspor
Age 25 (05.04.96)
Young keeper, brilliant reflexes but the odd lapse in concentration. Started the World Cup qualifiers in March so may have edged himself into the No.1 spot.



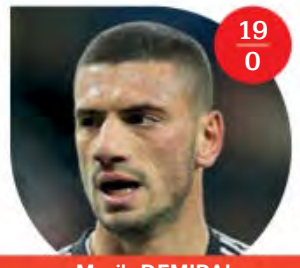
Mert GUNOK
Istanbul Basaksehir
Age 32 (01.03.89)
The most experienced keeper in the squad, good shot-stopper but questionable distribution. Was first choice in qualifying and in autumn's Nations League.

DEFENDERS



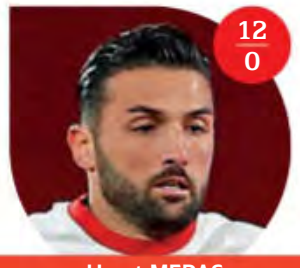
Kaan AYHAN
Sassulo (Ita)
Age 26 (10.11.94)
The German-born centre-back offers Gunes depth in defence and in central midfield. Played for Germany and Turkey's youth teams.

Mehmet Zeki CELIK
Lille (Fra)
Age 24 (17.02.97)
Right-back who likes to get forward but doesn't neglect his defensive duties. Moved from the Turkish second-tier to be a first-choice starter at Lille.



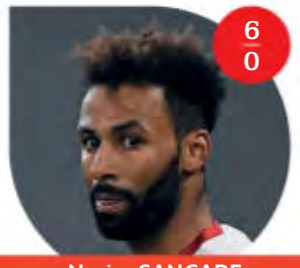
Merih DEMIRAL
Juventus (Ita)
Age 23 (05.03.98)
Tough-tackling, no-nonsense centre-back not afraid to get stuck in. Brilliant in the air and a nightmare for attacking players. Tall, strong and powerful.

Ozan KABAK
Liverpool (Eng)
Age 21 (25.03.00)
Few players play a starting role as Liverpool centre-back aged only 20, but that is exactly what Kabak has done since January. Has a very promising future.



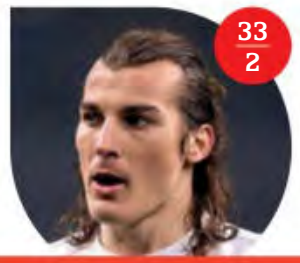
Umut MERAS
Le Havre (Fra)
Age 25 (20.12.95)
One of the few left-back options Gunes has available. Could edge out the more experience pair Caner Erkin and Hasan Ali Kaldirim for the position.

Mert MULDUR
Sassulo (Ita)
Age 22 (03.04.99)
Austrian-born right-back, one of several players in the national team born outside Turkey. A versatile player able to play on the right side of midfield as well.

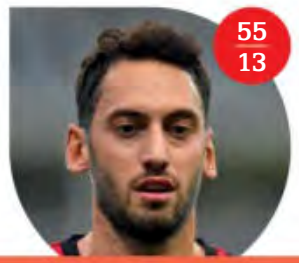


Nazim SANGARE
Fenerbahce
Age 26 (30.05.94)
Useful deputy for Celik. Offers an injection of pace to a team that is not exactly the quickest. German-born to a Turkish mother and Guinean father.

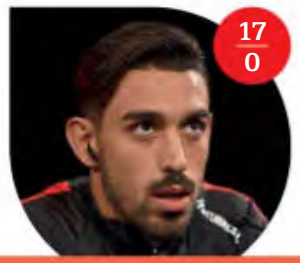
MIDFIELDERS



Caglar SOYUNCU
Leicester City (Eng)
Age 24 (23.05.96)
The man mountain could walk into most teams at Euro 2020. The rock in the Turkish back-line - aerially strong, a tough tackler and classy on the ball.

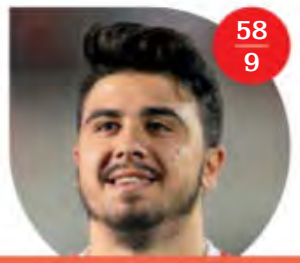


Hakan CALHANOGLU
Milan (Ita)
Age 27 (08.02.94)
Talismanic attacking midfielder. Will be on set-piece duty. Possesses a dangerous long-shot and excellent crossing ability.

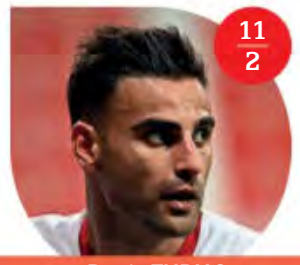


Irfan Can KAHVECI
Fenerbahce
Age 25 (15.06.95)
A real creative spark who played regularly in qualifying. Completed a big-money move from Istanbul Basaksehir to Fenerbahce in January.

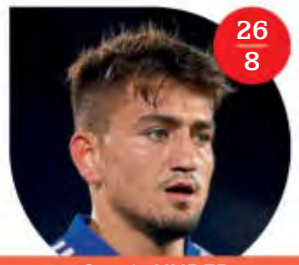
Orkun KOKCU
Feyenoord (Ned)
Age 20 (29.12.00)
New to the national team. Dutch-born central midfielder with the potential to solve Gunes' lack of creativity. Linked with Arsenal before extending at Feyenoord.



Ozan TUFAN
Fenerbahce
Age 26 (23.03.95)
Box-to-box midfielder, linking defence to attack. Works hard, defends and contributes to attacking moves. A fixture in the team in recent times.

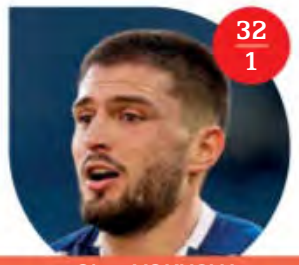


Deniz TURUC
Istanbul Basaksehir
Age 28 (29.01.93)
Loves to dribble and use his pace, which offers Senol Gunes options for counter-attacks. Mostly used as a substitute when opponents are tiring.



Cengiz UNDER
Leicester City (Eng)
Age 23 (14.07.97)
Has a good international scoring record and adds explosive pace to a team that is lacking in that department. His loan from Roma hasn't really worked out.

Yusuf YAZICI
Lille (Fra)
Age 24 (29.01.97)
Brilliant for Lille, adds attacking flair and creativity - something that was sorely lacking in the qualifiers. Has not been able to shine for Turkey yet.



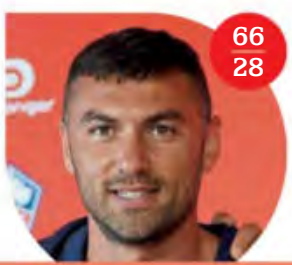
Okay YOKUSLU
West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
Age 27 (09.03.94)
The towering midfielder adds muscle to Turkey's defensive set-up. Surprisingly good on the ball for such a physical player. On loan from Celta Vigo.

FORWARDS

Kenan KARAMAN
Fortuna Dusseldorf (Ger)
Age 27 (05.03.94)
Tall forward who played every World Cup qualifier in March and all six Nations League games last autumn. Set to leave Germany in the summer.

Cenk TOSUN
Besiktas
Age 29 (07.06.91)
Struggled at Everton but back playing regularly on loan at Besiktas. Dangerous on his day and a pretty good record for the national team, but injury-hit.

Enes UNAL
Getafe (Sap)
Age 23 (10.05.97)
Tipped as being the future star striker of the national team but has so far failed to reach his potential. Once on the books of Manchester City.



Burak YILMAZ
Lille (Fra)
Age 35 (15.07.85)
In-form striker enjoying a renaissance at the age of 35. Scored a fabulous hat-trick in a 4-2 World Cup qualifying victory over Netherlands in March.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Gokhan AKKAN (Caykur Rizespor), Ersin DESTANOGLU (Besiktas)
DEFENDERS Abdulkerim BARDAKCI (Konyaspor), Caner ERKIN (Fenerbahce), Hasan Ali KALDIRIM (Istanbul Basaksehir)
MIDFIELDERS Halil AKBUNAR (Goztepe), Taylan ANTALYALI (Galatasaray), Emre KILINC (Galatasaray), Mahmut TEKDEMIR (Istanbul Basaksehir), Dorukhan TOKOZ (Besiktas), Salih UCAN (Alanyaspor)
FORWARDS Halil DERVISOGLU (Galatasaray), Enis DESTAN (Altinordu)

Andriy the giant

National icon Shevchenko continues to have a massive impact on Ukrainian football

The Ukraine national team has changed significantly since the last Euros, making impressive progress during that period. However, such development did not happen by magic. It required the coaching talent of Andriy Shevchenko, the knowledge of his Italian assistants – Mauro Tassotti and Andrea Maldera – as well as the responsible decisions of the Ukrainian Association of Football (UAF) management team, headed by Andriy Pavelko.

"We lost all three games in the group at Euro 2016. It was a devastating failure. It became clear that all previous efforts to develop Ukrainian football were insufficient and required a re-think. We needed a motivator on the coaching bench so not to lose another generation of players", the UAF president said.

His decision to appoint Andriy Shevchenko as head coach turned out to be decisive. Ukraine, under their new mentor, fell just short of qualifying for the 2018 World Cup after a home defeat to Croatia in the final round of games knocked them out of contention. However, the work done by Shevchenko and his coaching team was not in vain. Ukraine won six out of eight qualifiers, drawing their other two in Portugal and Serbia, to secure their Euro 2020 spot.

The successful qualifying campaign has brought new leaders to the fore. Midfielders Ruslan Malinovskyi and Oleksandr Zinchenko, and forward Roman Yaremchuk, have developed from potential stars to bona fide heroes of *Zbirna*. Experienced players such as battling midfielder Taras Stepanenko, creative, naturalised Brazilian Marlos and attacker Andriy Yarmolenko still play a very important role too.

> The successful qualifying campaign has brought new leaders to the fore

Ukraine have continued to blood youth as well, with promising youngsters having performed admirably recently. Among them, 19-year-old goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin, 18-year-old central defender Ilya Zabarnyi and 21-year-old left-back Vitaliy Mykolenko. And that's not to forget right-sided attacking midfielder Viktor Tsyhankov, who was voted the Ukrainian Premier League Footballer of the Year in 2020 at the age of 22. He has great potential, but unfortunately is prone to injuries.

One to watch... Vitaliy Mykolenko

The goalkeeper's position is one of the unexpected problems to solve before the start of the Euros. Captain and most experienced member of the team, 36-year-old Andriy Pyatov, has lost his No.1 status at Shakhtar Donetsk this season. Whether he will remain the first-choice goalkeeper for the Euros is a big dilemma for Shevchenko.

According to the UAF president, Shevchenko has done a great job: "Ukraine did not lose a single game on its way to Euro 2020 and finished first place in the group. It happened for the first time in the history of our national team. This is not the last chapter in the book. I'm sure at the Euros, Ukraine will surprise many football experts and fans".

Oleg Zadernovsky

ANDRIY SHEVCHENKO

What game under your management do you consider the best so far?
I received a lot of applause after our win over Portugal. I was satisfied because the team played well and reached an important objective, winning a decisive European qualifying group match against a great opponent and one of the best players of all time – Cristiano Ronaldo.

How do you deal with the tremendous pressure of being Ukraine coach?
It was rather difficult at the beginning but now I have acquired immunity. I balance myself. When the match has already been lost, you always need to evaluate why this happened. This is by working on mistakes and the best cure for sleepless nights.

What is your main coaching principle?
I do not look at the result. The most important thing for me is the quality of the game, its content. Whether the players fulfilled the assigned tasks or not? Could they have played better? Of course, there are always hard moments. Football does not exist without them. At the same time, I am proud that my players always fight to the end. We have a team that is progressing. I'm

Upset...Ukraine held France to a 1-1 draw in Paris in March

confident we're moving in the right direction.

What do you want to achieve as coach of the Ukrainian national team and at this summer's European Championship?
The harder it is to succeed, the more it motivates me. I believed in the players during our qualifying journey and they answered me in return. My team must have an identity but, above all, it must win.

Is there a chance for the appearance of some new faces in the Ukrainian national team before the start of the Euros?
I will not block the way to the national team for anyone. I am always looking for a reinforcement for the team's game structure. At the same time, candidates must match the level of the national team. Fortunately, our team is quite competitive. We have enough players who perform at a good level in leading clubs. In general, I do not exclude the emergence of new faces, but they have to win their place in the final roster.

What would you consider a worthy result at the Euros?
The minimum task is to qualify from the group. We have a well-balanced team. Everything will depend on our readiness.

Euro 2012... Shevchenko played his last game for Ukraine in 2012

What would you say is the limit of Ukraine's capabilities at Euro 2020?
We will be trying to set the bar very high. My job is to remove any minuses that would not allow the team to win. However, if the match ends up being lost because the opponent played stronger than us, then this is football. For me and my team, every game at the European Championship will be like a final in which we have to win.

Oleg Zadernovsky

TACTICS

Short-passing midfield triangles

When in possession and during attacking phases of the game, Ukraine adopt a 4-3-3 scheme. When Shevchenko reverts to defensive tactics, the system changes to 4-1-4-1. In both cases, the triangle in the centre of the pitch is key. In the former, it sharpens by its cone for attacking actions, and in the second, it becomes inverted with a bias towards defensive duties.

Shevchenko also experimented with a 3-4-1-2 in March's World Cup qualifiers (mainly due to several injury withdrawals), which suggests he does have a Plan B in mind if required.

Either way, the philosophy remains the same. On average, up to 80 per cent of all passes made by Ukraine are short to medium passes. The presence of players such as Malinovskyi, Yarmolenko and Yaremchuk, who are capable controllers of the ball, pulling several opponents out of position and providing an extraordinary pass, make them the main focal points of the attacking structure.

At the other end, the centre-backs may be a weak spot – especially against top opponents. Both Serhiy Kryvtsov and Vitaly Matviyenko can struggle to read the game, while Zabarnyi is inexperienced.

Ruslan Malinovskyi... the Atalanta man scored or assisted six goals in qualifying

Versatile... Manchester City's Oleksandr Zinchenko

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
May 23
v **Bahrain**
(h, Kharkiv)
Jun 3
v **Northern Ireland**
(h, Venue TBC)
Jun 7
v **Cyprus**
(h, Venue TBC)

Romanian National Arena... Ukraine play twice in Bucharest

GROUP GAMES
Jun 13
v **Netherlands**
(Amsterdam)
Jun 17
v **North Macedonia**
(Bucharest)
Jun 21
v **Austria**
(Bucharest)

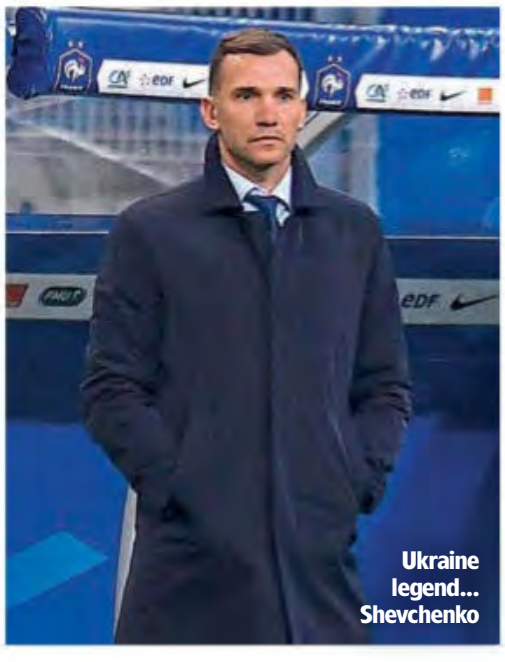
THE VIEW FROM UKRAINE

"The main strength of the current Ukraine national team is coach Andriy Shevchenko and his coaching staff. He was able to radically change the mentality of the players. The team's playing style has become more modern and balanced too. I'm sure Ukraine has every chance of qualifying from the group."

Yuriy Chernyaga, Komanda Online

"The players have ceased to be afraid of rivals. This is the psychology of winners. They could have been scared of the reigning European champions Portugal, but this did not happen. Our footballers got the necessary boost of confidence and this could be decisive for the team."

Ihor Belanov, 1986 Ballon d'Or winner



Ukraine legend... Shevchenko

COACH

Andriy SHEVCHENKO
Age 44 (29.09.76)
Appointed July 2016

Andriy Shevchenko is the most famous football personality since Ukraine's independence. Nicknamed "Sheva", he joined Milan in 1999 from Dynamo Kiev where, in 2004, he won the Ballon d'Or.

In the summer of 2016, he replaced Mykhaylo Fomenko as head coach of Ukraine by signing a two-year contract. He failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, but made amends by helping the nation qualify for this summer's Euros.

In June 2020, Shevchenko signed a contract extension until the end of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

THE SQUAD

● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

5 / 0

Heorhiy BUSHCHAN
Dynamo Kiev
Age 26 (31.05.94)
A keeper with bags of courage who can save the team in hopeless situations. Featured in the 1-0 Nations League victory over Spain.

96 / 0

Andriy PYATOV
Shakhtar Donetsk
Age 36 (28.06.84)
A very experienced goalkeeper who played all three matches in the Euro 2016 group stage. Surprisingly lost his No.1 status at Shakhtar this season.

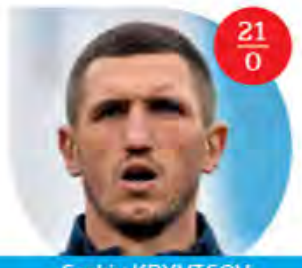
1 / 0

Anatoliy TRUBIN
Shakhtar Donetsk
Age 19 (01.08.01)
The most talented young keeper in Ukraine right now. Performed superbly for Shakhtar in the Champions League group stage.

DEFENDERS

30 / 1

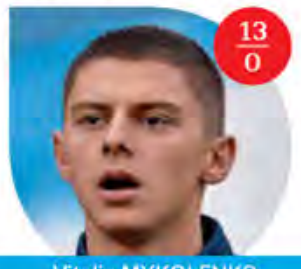
Oleksandr KARAVAYEV
Dynamo Kiev
Age 28 (02.06.92)
Former Shakhtar Donetsk reserve right-back. After an unsuccessful short spell at Fenerbahce, he regained his reputation at Zorya Luhansk.


21 / 0

Serhiy KRYVTSOV
Shakhtar Donetsk
Age 30 (15.03.91)
Injury-prone central defender. He can alternate between quality displays and very poor ones. Off the pitch he likes to sing karaoke.

33 / 0

Mykola MATVIYENKO
Shakhtar Donetsk
Age 25 (02.05.96)
A Shakhtar football academy graduate. Became a footballer thanks to his father, who had to stop playing due to serious injury. A likely starter.


13 / 0

Vitaliy MYKOLENKO
Dynamo Kiev
Age 21 (29.05.99)
A physically gifted and attack minded left-back who can play well at centre-back too. Used to be a ball boy at Dynamo Kiev but now an established starter.

19 / 0

Eduard SOBOL
Club Brugge (Blg)
Age 26 (20.04.95)
Left-back considered one of the most promising defenders in Ukraine several seasons ago. Loaned to six different clubs, but is joining Brugge permanently.

6 / 0

Ilya ZABARNYI
Dynamo Kiev
Age 18 (01.09.02)
One of Ukraine's brightest young talents. Revelation of the current season. A powerful central defender, calm and confident beyond his years.

MIDFIELDERS

86 / 21

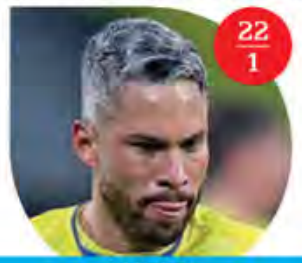
Yevhen KONOPLYANKA
Shakhtar Donetsk
Age 31 (29.09.89)
A flamboyant left midfielder who failed to fulfil his great potential at Sevilla and Schalke. Bit-part player at Shakhtar since 2019.

32 / 0

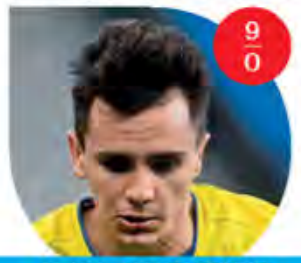
Viktor KOVALENKO
Atalanta (Ita)
Age 25 (14.02.96)
Gifted central midfielder. Considered the best of his generation in Ukraine but failed to fully develop at Shakhtar. Moved to Italy in 2021.

35 / 6

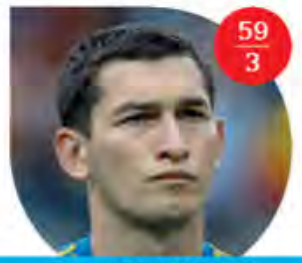
Ruslan MALINOVSKYI
Atalanta (Ita)
Age 28 (04.05.93)
Cool, creative attacking midfielder. Deemed surplus to requirements at Shakhtar but has proven himself at Genk and Atalanta. Dictates the tempo.


22 / 1

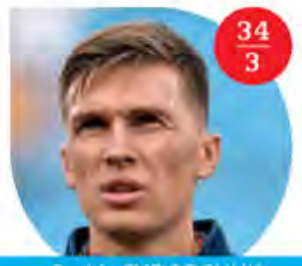
MARLOS
Shakhtar Donetsk
Age 32 (07.06.88)
Experienced and unselfish naturalised offensive midfielder. Blessed with the typical Brazilian touch. Can create and finish attacks from the right flank.


9 / 0

Mykola SHAPARENKO
Dynamo Kiev
Age 22 (04.10.98)
A very creative playmaker. Has great scope for development. Scored his first goal in the Ukrainian Premier League at the tender age of just 16.


59 / 3

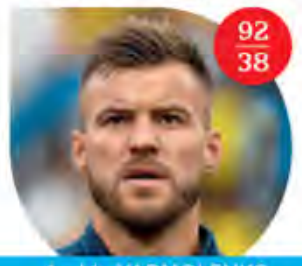
Taras STEPANENKO
Shakhtar Donetsk
Age 31 (08.08.89)
A very experienced, aggressive holding midfielder. Participated at Euro 2016. Shares a hotel and restaurant business with club team-mate Serhiy Kryvtsov.


34 / 3

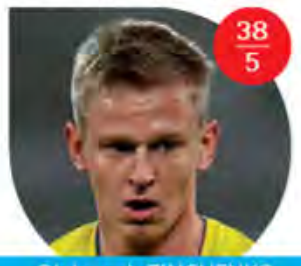
Serhiy SYDORCHUK
Dynamo Kiev
Age 30 (02.05.91)
Defensive midfielder, captain of Dynamo Kiev and likely back-up to Stepanenko. Has an excellent long-range strike. Bad-tempered, he often receives red cards.

25 / 5

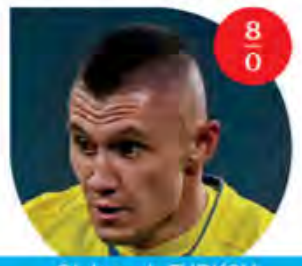
Viktor TSYHANKOV
Dynamo Kiev
Age 23 (15.11.97)
Smart right-sided midfielder and golden boy of Ukrainian football. His weak physical conditioning has prevented him from being a regular starter.


92 / 38

Andriy YARMOLENKO
West Ham United (Eng)
Age 31 (23.10.89)
Played at Euro 2012 and Euro 2016. Ukraine's second-highest goalscorer of all time behind Shevchenko. Missed most of his club season at West Ham.

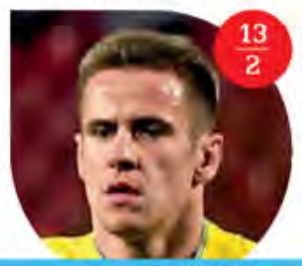

38 / 5

Oleksandr ZINCHENKO
Manchester City (Eng)
Age 24 (15.12.96)
Skilful midfielder who plays in central midfield for his country but left-back for his club. His wife works as a football presenter on Ukrainian TV.


8 / 0

Oleksandr ZUBKOV
Ferencvaros (Hun)
Age 24 (03.08.96)
Dynamic powerful midfielder. Strong, energetic and speedy, he established himself this season both for his Hungarian club Ferencvaros and Ukraine.

FORWARDS


13 / 2

Artem BESYEDIN
Dynamo Kiev
Age 25 (31.03.96)
An industrious, battering ram-type forward. Very effective in pressing the opponent's defence. Back after a one-year doping ban.

11 / 1

Junior MORAES
Shakhtar Donetsk
Age 33 (04.04.87)
Naturalised Brazilian who's played for three different clubs in Ukraine since 2012 and has a prolific scoring rate. Known for his charitable work.

22 / 7

Roman YAREMCHUK
Gent (Blg)
Age 25 (27.11.95)
A strong striker who is rapidly gaining credibility both at club level and for Ukraine. Can use Euro 2020 as a springboard to one of Europe's top leagues.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Andriy LUNIN (Real Madrid, Spa), Dmytro RIZNYK (Vorskla Poltava)
DEFENDERS Yukhym KONOPLYA (Desna Chernihiv), Viktor KORNIYENKO (Shakhtar Donetsk), Bohdan MYKHAYLICHENKO (Anderlecht, Blg), Oleksandr SYROTA (Dynamo Kiev), Oleksandr TYMCHYK (Dynamo Kiev)
MIDFIELDERS Ihor KHARATIN (Ferencvaros, Hun), Yevhen MAKARENKO (Kortrijk, Blg), Volodymyr SHEPELYEV (Dynamo Kiev)
FORWARDS Artem DOVBYK (Dnipro), Vladyslav SUPRIAHA (Dynamo Kiev)

Moore options than ever

Young Dragons ready for Euro challenge

It was five years ago that Chris Coleman's Wales made history as they reached the last four during their one and only appearance at a Euros finals. Qualifying under the guidance of Manchester United legend Ryan Giggs, there is a very different look to this youthful Welsh team, but the manager's faith in fast-tracking young players through the fabled pathway system has been vindicated in both their success and their potential to achieve more.

Undefeated group winners in the Nations League, there is a fearless energy and confidence to the side that has been under the leadership of interim manager Rob Page since last November. Players such as Neco Williams and Dylan Levitt have become established internationals while still trying to make their way through the formative years of their senior club careers, while the likes of Joe Morrell, Chris Mepham, Tom Lockyer and Rhys Norrington-Davies have made seamless transitions to the international stage.

However, the senior figures remain key to what Wales can achieve. Gareth Bale is still a talismanic presence in the side's attack, while Joe Allen and Aaron Ramsey continue to pull the strings in midfield just as they did in France in 2016, although captain Ashley Williams has now retired. But there is a strength in depth to this team that previous managers did not have the benefit of, and the decision to make substantial changes to Coleman's side has formed the basis of what is a new and exciting era for this team.

> There is a strength in depth to this team that previous managers did not have the benefit of

Ryan Giggs also showed his tactical acumen during the qualifying campaign. Defeats against Croatia and Hungary at the midway point left Wales in a difficult position in the group. Kieffer Moore was brought in for his international debut at the age of 27. The towering striker proved to be the missing piece of the puzzle as Wales remained undefeated for the rest of the campaign, and the Cardiff City frontman has been a key figure ever since.

Target man... Kieffer Moore

After Ramsey scored both goals in the decisive victory over Hungary that sealed their place at the tournament, Giggs cut an emotional figure at the final whistle, and his reaction dispelled any doubts over his commitment to the job. Dividing opinion at the time of his appointment, his future with the national team remains in the balance, but Page has successfully taken on the responsibility of preparing the squad and the memories of 2016 are already flooding back.

Mark Pitman

ROB PAGE

How have you found the experience of stepping into the role as manager in place of Ryan Giggs, and what difference has it made to the team and your preparations for matches?
The buck stops with me on the touchline, but with regards to the plan and how we go about our daily business, the work ethic, the values that Ryan instilled when he first took over, that's no different. The players understand what's expected of them from the minute they walk onto the grass until the minute they leave. In team meetings, we give as much detail as we can in terms of the game plan, so whether Ryan's there or not, that doesn't change. The only difference is on the touchline on a match day, and that's pretty much it.

How impressed have you been with the way the young players in the squad have taken to international football and do you think they are ready to shine?
I'm really proud of them. We always wanted that strength in depth, and once these players showed in the intermediate age groups that they were ready, we promoted them straightaway. Some have moved up from the U21s and some straight from the

Star man...Aaron Ramsey booked Wales' place at the Euros with a brace against Hungary

U19s, and they've all taken it in their stride. They're good characters first and foremost, and there are no superstars in the changing room. They're competitive and they want to win, and that shines through in the environment we have here. The senior players know they can't rest as there are young players who want their jersey. It makes for a great environment and that's credit to the young players and how they have stepped up.

Do you think the postponement of Euro 2020 for a 12-month period has actually benefited Wales?
Absolutely. It's given some players the opportunity to recover from injury and others the opportunity to play regular competitive football and put a stamp on why they should be in the Euros squad. I think we've got a crop of young players who have come through that make this an exciting time for Welsh football, not just for this summer, but for the next five, six or seven years. A lot of these players are only going to get better.

There's a strong mix of youth and experience in this Wales squad now. How vital will that combination be at this summer's tournament?
The experience of the senior players will help a lot. At times, nerves can play a factor when you've not been in a certain situation or position before, but a lot of players in this squad have, and they can go back to their experiences of Euro 2016 and help the younger players. We've got a good blend in there, they all get along, and the senior players can certainly help the younger ones when it comes to leaning on that experience.

Mark Pitman

Captain... Gareth Bale

TACTICS

Energy plus discipline

Although the increased strength in depth has enabled a certain amount of tactical versatility, there are some principles to this Wales team that will not be compromised upon. The Nations League offered an opportunity for Giggs, and later Page, to experiment with the squad and the system, with variations of 4-2-3-1 and 3-4-3 formations being used. However, the consistent element in each shape was the presence of a defensive midfield double-pivot, with this safety precaution placing an emphasis on the wide players to push forward at every opportunity and provide service for the height of Kieffer Moore and Gareth Bale in the penalty area.

But there is much more to Wales than just playing the ball up to the target man, and with a non-negotiable approach to playing the ball out from deep positions, the creativity of the likes of Joe Allen and Ethan Ampadu is used to good effect. With Daniel James, Harry Wilson and David Brooks all in equal contention for a place in the attacking third, there is a formidable amount of pace in this team, and the high-energy system will cause problems for even the most talented and disciplined of defences.

Speedy wingers... Bale and James

Heart of defence... Spurs' Joe Rodon

SCHEDULE

FRIENDLIES
Jun 2
v **France**
(a, Nice)
Jun 5
v **Albania**
(h, Cardiff)

Baku Olympic Stadium...two of Wales' group games are in Azerbaijan

GROUP GAMES
Jun 12
v **Switzerland**
(Baku)
Jun 16
v **Turkey**
(Baku)
Jun 20
v **Italy**
(Rome)

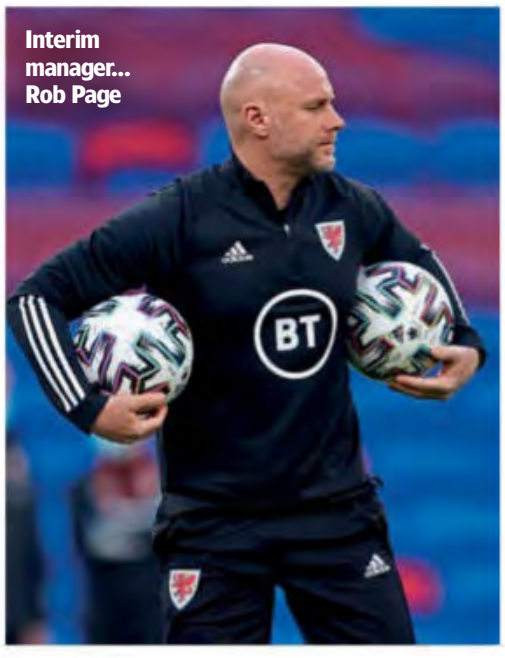
THE VIEW FROM WALES

"Wales will find it tough to match their run to the semi-finals of Euro 2016. But key players – skipper Gareth Bale, Aaron Ramsey and Joe Allen – remain and a host of youngsters add vibrancy and more options. Recent success has been built on a solid defence and more upsets should not be ruled out."

Phil Blanche, PA news agency

"It's been a surprise how well the young players have done, as the last few years have been a transitional period. I don't think the issue with the manager will affect the squad. They will just be more concerned about their place in the team."

Owain Tudur Jones, ex-Wales international and S4C pundit



Interim manager... Rob Page

COACH

Rob PAGE
Age: 46 (03.09.74)
Appointed August 2019

A Football League journeyman, Page gained a reputation as a solid and uncompromising defender who also made 41 appearances for Wales. Following a spell in club management with Port Vale and Northampton Town, he was appointed Wales U21 manager in 2017 and played a key role in the progression and development of a number of the current senior squad.

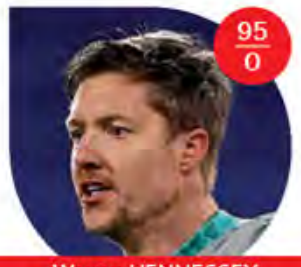
Promoted to work alongside Giggs in the summer of 2019, Page took over the role as interim manager for the final Nations League games last November.

THE SQUAD

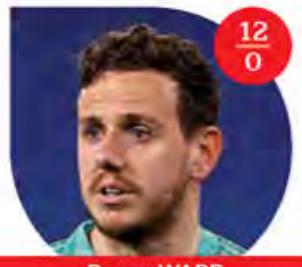
● = caps, goals, clubs and ages (as of 14.05.21)

GOALKEEPERS

Adam DAVIES
Stoke City (Eng)
Age 28 (17.07.92)
Former Everton youth player who was born in Germany. Made his debut for Wales in a friendly against Trinidad & Tobago in 2019.



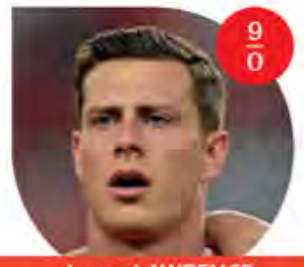
Wayne HENNESSEY
Crystal Palace (Eng)
Age 34 (24.01.87)
The most-capped goalkeeper in the history of the national team, and just a handful off a century, having made his debut back in 2007. A veteran of Euro 2016.



Danny WARD
Leicester City (Eng)
Age 27 (22.06.93)
A former Liverpool shot-stopper who came through the ranks at Wrexham. Started the opening Euro 2016 win over Slovakia after Hennessey suffered a back issue.

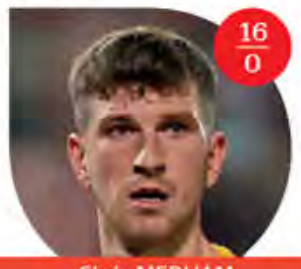
DEFENDERS

Ben DAVIES
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 28 (24.04.93)
A veteran of Euro 2016 but missed the semi-final defeat to Portugal through suspension. A solid, versatile and reliable leader at the back.



James LAWRENCE
St. Pauli (Ger)
Age 28 (22.08.92)
A late arrival to the international scene after making his Wales debut in 2018. An important and experienced figure in this young squad.

Tom LOCKYER
Luton Town (Eng)
Age 26 (03.12.94)
A reliable Cardiff-born central defender who has impressed since making his international debut under Chris Coleman back in November 2017.



Chris MEPHAM
Bournemouth (Eng)
Age 23 (05.11.97)
An impressive and consistent performer at the back for Wales, having progressed through the intermediate ranks. Plays on the right of the regular back three.

Rhys NORRINGTON-DAVIES
Stoke City (Eng)
Age 22 (22.04.99)
Talented full-back who impressed on his Wales debut away to Bulgaria in the Nations League last year and has since won a further handful of caps.

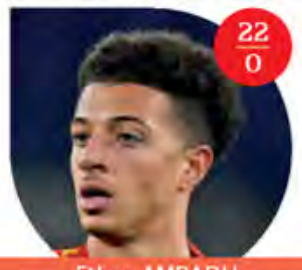
Connor ROBERTS
Swansea City (Eng)
Age 25 (23.09.95)
High-energy full-back who is as influential in defence as he is in the attacking third for both club and country. Scored his only goal against the Republic of Ireland.

Joe RODON
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 23 (22.10.97)
Imposing presence who can comfortably play the ball out from the back. Beginning to establish himself in the Premier League for Tottenham.

Neco WILLIAMS
Liverpool (Eng)
Age 20 (13.04.01)
Versatile full-back, who can play on either side, and is particularly dangerous pushing forward from wide positions. Scored the winner against Bulgaria in September.

MIDFIELDERS

Joe ALLEN
Stoke City (Eng)
Age 31 (14.03.90)
One of the key players for Wales at Euro 2016. Strong in and out of possession, Allen has returned from long-term injury for the tournament.

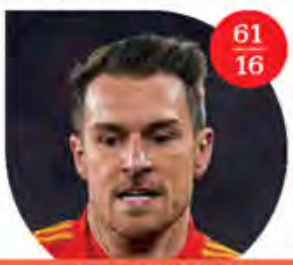


Ethan AMPADU
Sheffield United (Eng)
Age 20 (14.09.00)
Highly-rated and versatile figure who is comfortable in the centre of midfield or defence. Spent the season on-loan at struggling Sheffield United from Chelsea.

David BROOKS
Bournemouth (Eng)
Age 23 (08.07.97)
An exciting winger with an impressive goal return. Creative on the ball and has the pace and ability to test the opposition, but plagued by injury.

Dylan LEVITT
Istra 1961 (Cro)
Age 20 (17.11.00)
Highly-rated by the coaching staff at parent club Manchester United and looked comfortable performing for Wales during the 2020-21 Nations League.

Joe MORRELL
Luton Town (Eng)
Age 24 (03.01.97)
A solid performer in his defensive midfield role who has consistently produced for Wales since making his international debut against Belarus in 2019.

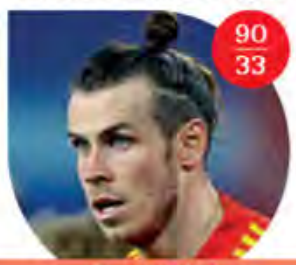


Aaron RAMSEY
Juventus (Ita)
Age 30 (26.12.90)
A world-class talent in midfield and a key figure for his country over the last decade, despite being hampered by injury and not being a regular for Juventus.

Jonny WILLIAMS
Cardiff City (Eng)
Age 27 (09.10.93)
A hugely-popular figure in the squad. He scored his first goal for his country against Bulgaria last October in the Nations League on his 25th appearance.

Harry WILSON
Cardiff City (Eng)
Age 24 (22.03.97)
Enjoying a successful loan spell at Cardiff City from Liverpool. Became the youngest-ever Wales player when he made his debut at the age of 16 in 2013.

FORWARDS



Gareth BALE
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Age 31 (16.07.89)
Their captain and talisman. Four-time Champions League winner with parent club Real Madrid and Wales' all-time leading goalscorer.

Daniel JAMES
Manchester United (Eng)
Age 23 (10.11.97)
Exciting and talented winger who made a big impression on his arrival at Old Trafford. Has hit some vital goals, like the winner against Czech Republic in March.

Kieffer MOORE
Cardiff City (Eng)
Age 28 (08.08.92)
Another late arrival on the international stage but has established himself as a key striker in the team and played a crucial role in qualification.

Tyler ROBERTS
Leeds United (Eng)
Age 22 (19.01.99)
Versatile forward who can play across the front-line. His pace and energy has endeared him to Leeds United manager Marcelo Bielsa.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS Tom KING (Newport County, Eng)
DEFENDERS Ben CABANGO (Swansea City, Eng), Chris GUNTER (Charlton Athletic, Eng)
MIDFIELDERS Josh SHEEHAN (Newport County, Eng), Matthew SMITH (Doncaster Rovers, Eng), Will VAULKS (Cardiff City, Eng)
FORWARDS Brennan JOHNSON (Lincoln City, Eng), Tom LAWRENCE (Derby County, Eng), Rabbi MATONDO (Stoke City, Eng), Hal ROBSON-KANU (West Bromwich Albion, Eng)

AUSTRIA

GROUP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Poland	10	8	1	1	18	5	25
2 Austria	10	6	1	3	19	9	19
3 North Macedonia	10	4	2	4	12	13	14
4 Slovenia	10	4	2	4	16	11	14
5 Israel	10	3	2	5	16	18	11
6 Latvia	10	1	0	9	3	28	3

21.03.19	Austria 0	1 Poland
24.03.19	Israel 4	2 Austria
07.06.19	Austria 1	0 Slovenia
10.06.19	North Macedonia 1	4 Austria
06.09.19	Austria 6	0 Latvia
09.09.19	Poland 0	0 Austria
10.10.19	Austria 3	1 Israel
13.10.19	Slovenia 0	1 Austria
16.11.19	Austria 2	1 North Macedonia
19.11.19	Latvia 1	0 Austria

BELGIUM

GROUP I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Belgium	10	10	0	0	40	3	30
2 Russia	10	8	0	2	33	8	24
3 Scotland	10	5	0	5	16	19	15
4 Cyprus	10	3	1	6	15	20	10
5 Kazakhstan	10	3	1	6	13	17	10
6 San Marino	10	0	0	10	1	51	0

21.03.19	Belgium 3	1 Russia
24.03.19	Cyprus 0	2 Belgium
08.06.19	Belgium 3	0 Kazakhstan
11.06.19	Belgium 3	0 Scotland
06.09.19	San Marino 0	4 Belgium
09.09.19	Scotland 0	4 Belgium
10.10.19	Belgium 9	0 San Marino
13.10.19	Kazakhstan 0	2 Belgium
16.11.19	Russia 1	4 Belgium
19.11.19	Belgium 6	1 Cyprus

CROATIA

GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Croatia	8	5	2	1	17	7	17
2 Wales	8	4	2	2	10	6	14
3 Slovakia	8	4	1	3	13	11	13
4 Hungary	8	4	0	4	8	11	12
5 Azerbaijan	8	0	1	7	5	18	1

21.03.19	Croatia 2	1 Azerbaijan
24.03.19	Hungary 2	1 Croatia
08.06.19	Croatia 2	1 Wales
06.09.19	Slovakia 0	4 Croatia
09.09.19	Azerbaijan 1	1 Croatia
10.10.19	Croatia 3	0 Hungary
13.10.19	Wales 1	1 Croatia
16.11.19	Croatia 3	1 Slovakia

CZECH REPUBLIC

GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 England	8	7	0	1	37	6	21
2 Czech Republic	8	5	0	3	13	11	15
3 Kosovo	8	3	2	3	13	16	11
4 Bulgaria	8	1	3	4	6	17	6
5 Montenegro	8	0	3	5	3	22	3

22.03.19	England 5	0 Czech Republic
07.06.19	Czech Republic 2	1 Bulgaria
10.06.19	Czech Republic 3	0 Montenegro
07.09.19	Kosovo 2	1 Czech Republic
10.09.19	Montenegro 0	3 Czech Republic
11.10.19	Czech Republic 2	1 England
14.11.19	Czech Republic 2	1 Kosovo
17.11.19	Bulgaria 1	0 Czech Republic

Ondrej Celustka... the Czech defender celebrates scoring against Kosovo

DENMARK

GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Switzerland	8	5	2	1	19	6	17
2 Denmark	8	4	4	0	23	6	16
3 Republic of Ireland	8	3	4	1	7	5	13
4 Georgia	8	2	2	4	7	11	8
5 Gibraltar	8	0	0	8	3	31	0

26.03.19	Switzerland 3	3 Denmark
07.06.19	Denmark 1	1 Republic of Ireland
10.06.19	Denmark 5	1 Georgia
05.09.19	Gibraltar 0	6 Denmark
08.09.19	Georgia 0	0 Denmark
12.10.19	Denmark 1	0 Switzerland
15.11.19	Denmark 6	0 Gibraltar
18.11.19	Republic of Ireland 1	1 Denmark

ENGLAND

GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 England	8	7	0	1	37	6	21
2 Czech Republic	8	5	0	3	13	11	15
3 Kosovo	8	3	2	3	13	16	11
4 Bulgaria	8	1	3	4	6	17	6
5 Montenegro	8	0	3	5	3	22	3

22.03.19	England 5	0 Czech Republic
25.03.19	Montenegro 1	5 England
07.09.19	England 4	0 Bulgaria
10.09.19	England 5	3 Kosovo
11.10.19	Czech Republic 2	1 England
14.10.19	Bulgaria 0	6 England
14.11.19	England 7	0 Montenegro
17.11.19	Kosovo 0	4 England

FINLAND

GROUP J	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Italy	10	10	0	0	37	4	30
2 Finland	10	6	0	4	16	10	18
3 Greece	10	4	2	4	12	14	14
4 Bosnia-Herzegovina	10	4	1	5	20	17	13
5 Armenia	10	3	1	6	14	25	10
6 Liechtenstein	10	0	2	8	2	31	2

23.03.19	Italy 2	0 Finland
26.03.19	Armenia 0	2 Finland
08.06.19	Finland 2	0 Bosnia-Herz.
11.06.19	Liechtenstein 0	2 Finland
05.09.19	Finland 1	0 Greece
08.09.19	Finland 1	2 Italy
12.10.19	Bosnia-Herz. 4	1 Finland
15.10.19	Finland 3	0 Armenia
15.11.19	Finland 3	0 Liechtenstein
18.11.19	Greece 2	1 Finland

FRANCE

GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 France	10	8	1	1	25	6	25
2 Turkey	10	7	2	1	18	3	23
3 Iceland	10	6	1	3	14	11	19
4 Albania	10	4	1	5	16	14	13
5 Andorra	10	1	1	8	3	20	4
6 Moldova	10	1	0	9	4	26	3

22.03.19	Moldova 1	4 France
25.03.19	France 4	0 Iceland
08.06.19	Turkey 2	0 France
11.06.19	Andorra 0	4 France
07.09.19	France 4	1 Albania
10.09.19	France 3	0 Andorra
11.10.19	Iceland 0	1 France
14.10.19	France 1	1 Turkey
14.11.19	France 2	1 Moldova
17.11.19	Albania 0	2 France

Ten out of ten... Belgium had a perfect record in qualifying

GERMANY

GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Germany	8	7	0	1	30	7	21
2 Netherlands	8	6	1	1	24	7	19
3 Northern Ireland	8	4	1	3	9	13	13
4 Belarus	8	1	1	6	4	16	4
5 Estonia	8	0	1	7	2	26	1

24.03.19	Netherlands 2	3 Germany
08.06.19	Belarus 0	2 Germany
11.06.19	Germany 8	0 Estonia
06.09.19	Germany 2	4 Netherlands
09.09.19	Northern Ireland 0	2 Germany
13.10.19	Estonia 0	3 Germany
16.11.19	Germany 4	0 Belarus
19.11.19	Germany 6	1 Northern Ireland

Returning... Hungary will play at their second straight European Championship

HUNGARY

(Reached play-offs via the 2018-19 UEFA Nations League)

GROUP C2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Finland	6	4	0	2	5	3	12
2 Hungary	**6**	**3**	**1**	**2**	**9**	**6**	**10**
3 Greece	6	3	0	3	4	5	9
4 Estonia	6	1	1	4	4	8	4

08.09.18	Finland 1	**0 Hungary**
11.09.18	**Hungary 2**	1 Greece
12.10.18	Greece 1	**0 Hungary**
15.10.18	Estonia 3	**3 Hungary**
15.11.18	**Hungary 2**	0 Estonia
18.11.18	**Hungary 2**	0 Finland

PLAY-OFFS PATH A

08.10.20	Bulgaria 1	**3 Hungary**
12.11.20	**Hungary 2**	1 Iceland

ITALY

GROUP J	W	P	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Italy	**10**	**10**	**0**	**0**	**37**	**4**	**30**
2 Finland	10	6	0	4	16	10	18
3 Greece	10	4	2	4	12	14	14
4 Bosnia-Herzegovina	10	4	1	5	20	17	13
5 Armenia	10	3	1	6	14	25	10
6 Liechtenstein	10	0	2	8	2	31	2

23.03.19	**Italy 2**	0 Finland
26.03.19	**Italy 6**	0 Liechtenstein
08.06.19	Greece 0	**3 Italy**
11.06.19	**Italy 2**	1 Bosnia-Herz.
05.09.19	Armenia 1	**3 Italy**
08.09.19	Finland 1	**2 Italy**
12.10.19	**Italy 2**	0 Greece
15.10.19	Liechtenstein 0	**5 Italy**
15.11.19	Bosnia-Herz. 0	**3 Italy**
18.11.19	**Italy 9**	1 Armenia

New era...Italy are back at the top table after missing the 2018 World Cup

NETHERLANDS

GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Germany	8	7	0	1	30	7	21
2 Netherlands	**8**	**6**	**1**	**1**	**24**	**7**	**19**
3 Northern Ireland	8	4	1	3	9	13	13
4 Belarus	8	1	1	6	4	16	4
5 Estonia	8	0	1	7	2	26	1

21.03.19	**Netherlands 4**	0 Belarus
24.03.19	**Netherlands 2**	3 Germany
06.09.19	Germany 2	**4 Netherlands**
09.09.19	Estonia 0	**4 Netherlands**
10.10.19	**Netherlands 3**	1 Northern Ireland
13.10.19	Belarus 1	**2 Netherlands**
16.11.19	Northern Ireland 0	**0 Netherlands**
19.11.19	**Netherlands 5**	0 Estonia

N. MACEDONIA

(Reached play-offs via the 2018-19 UEFA Nations League)

GROUP D4	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 North Macedonia	**6**	**5**	**0**	**1**	**14**	**5**	**15**
2 Armenia	6	3	1	2	14	8	10
3 Gibraltar	6	2	0	4	5	15	6
4 Liechtenstein	6	1	1	4	7	12	4

06.09.18	Gibraltar 0	**2 North Macedonia**
09.09.18	**North Macedonia 2**	0 Armenia
13.10.18	**North Macedonia 4**	1 Liechtenstein
16.10.18	Armenia 4	**0 North Macedonia**
16.11.18	Liechtenstein 0	**2 North Macedonia**
19.11.18	**North Macedonia 4**	0 Gibraltar

PLAY-OFFS PATH D

08.10.20	**North Macedonia 2**	1 Kosovo
12.11.20	Georgia 0	**1 North Macedonia**

Celebrations... North Macedonia reached their first major tournament via the play-offs

POLAND

GROUP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Poland	**10**	**8**	**1**	**1**	**18**	**5**	**25**
2 Austria	10	6	1	3	19	9	19
3 North Macedonia	10	4	2	4	12	13	14
4 Slovenia	10	4	2	4	16	11	14
5 Israel	10	3	2	5	16	18	11
6 Latvia	10	1	0	9	3	28	3

21.03.19	Austria 0	**1 Poland**
24.03.19	**Poland 2**	0 Latvia
07.06.19	North Macedonia 0	**1 Poland**
10.06.19	**Poland 4**	0 Israel
06.09.19	Slovenia 2	**0 Poland**
09.09.19	**Poland 0**	0 Austria
10.10.19	Latvia 0	**3 Poland**
13.10.19	**Poland 2**	0 North Macedonia
16.11.19	Israel 1	**2 Poland**
19.11.19	**Poland 3**	2 Slovenia

PORTUGAL

GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Ukraine	8	6	2	0	17	4	20
2 Portugal	**8**	**5**	**2**	**1**	**22**	**6**	**17**
3 Serbia	8	4	2	2	17	17	14
4 Luxembourg	8	1	1	6	7	16	4
5 Lithuania	8	0	1	7	5	25	1

22.03.19	**Portugal 0**	0 Ukraine
25.03.19	**Portugal 1**	1 Serbia
07.09.19	Serbia 2	**4 Portugal**
10.09.19	Lithuania 1	**5 Portugal**
11.10.19	**Portugal 3**	0 Luxembourg
14.10.19	Ukraine 2	**1 Portugal**
14.11.19	**Portugal 6**	0 Lithuania
17.11.19	Luxembourg 0	**2 Portugal**

RUSSIA

GROUP I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Belgium	10	10	0	0	40	3	30
2 Russia	**10**	**8**	**0**	**2**	**33**	**8**	**24**
3 Scotland	10	5	0	5	16	19	15
4 Cyprus	10	3	1	6	15	20	10
5 Kazakhstan	10	3	1	6	13	17	10
6 San Marino	10	0	0	10	1	51	0

21.03.19	Belgium 3	**1 Russia**
24.03.19	Kazakhstan 0	**4 Russia**
08.06.19	**Russia 9**	0 San Marino
11.06.19	**Russia 1**	0 Cyprus
06.09.19	Scotland 1	**2 Russia**
09.09.19	**Russia 1**	0 Kazakhstan
10.10.19	**Russia 4**	0 Scotland
13.10.19	Cyprus 0	**5 Russia**
16.11.19	**Russia 1**	4 Belgium
19.11.19	San Marino 0	**5 Russia**

SCOTLAND

(Reached play-offs via the 2018-19 UEFA Nations League)

GROUP C1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Scotland	**4**	**3**	**0**	**1**	**10**	**4**	**9**
2 Israel	4	2	0	2	6	5	6
3 Albania	4	1	0	3	1	8	3

10.09.18	**Scotland 2**	0 Albania
11.10.18	Israel 2	**1 Scotland**
17.11.18	Albania 0	**4 Scotland**
20.11.18	**Scotland 3**	2 Israel

PLAY-OFFS PATH C

08.10.20	**Scotland (P) 0**	0 Israel
12.11.20	Serbia 1	**1 (P) Scotland**

Penalties...Slovakia celebrate beating the Republic of Ireland in their play-off clash

SLOVAKIA

(Reached play-offs via the 2018-19 UEFA Nations League)

GROUP B1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Ukraine	4	3	0	1	5	5	9
2 Czech Republic	4	2	0	2	4	4	6
3 Slovakia	4	1	0	3	5	5	3

09.09.18	Ukraine 1	0 Slovakia
13.10.18	Slovakia 1	2 Czech Republic
16.11.18	Slovakia 4	1 Ukraine
19.11.18	Czech Republic 1	0 Slovakia

PLAY-OFFS PATH B

08.10.20	Slovakia (P) 0	0 Republic of Ireland
12.11.20	Northern Ireland 1	2 Slovakia (AET)

SPAIN

GROUP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Spain	10	8	2	0	31	5	26
2 Sweden	10	6	3	1	23	9	21
3 Norway	10	4	5	1	19	11	17
4 Romania	10	4	2	4	17	15	14
5 Faroe Islands	10	1	0	9	4	30	3
6 Malta	10	1	0	9	3	27	3

23.03.19	Spain 2	1 Norway
26.03.19	Malta 0	2 Spain
07.06.19	Faroe Islands 1	4 Spain
10.06.19	Spain 3	0 Sweden
05.09.19	Romania 1	2 Spain
08.09.19	Spain 4	0 Faroe Islands
12.10.19	Norway 1	1 Spain
15.10.19	Sweden 1	1 Spain
15.11.19	Spain 7	0 Malta
18.11.19	Spain 5	0 Romania

SWEDEN

GROUP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Spain	10	8	2	0	31	5	26
2 Sweden	10	6	3	1	23	9	21
3 Norway	10	4	5	1	19	11	17
4 Romania	10	4	2	4	17	15	14
5 Faroe Islands	10	1	0	9	4	30	3
6 Malta	10	1	0	9	3	27	3

23.03.19	Sweden 2	1 Romania
26.03.19	Norway 3	3 Sweden
07.06.19	Sweden 3	0 Malta
10.06.19	Spain 3	0 Sweden
05.09.19	Faroe Islands 0	4 Sweden
08.09.19	Sweden 1	1 Norway
12.10.19	Malta 0	4 Sweden
15.10.19	Sweden 1	1 Spain
15.11.19	Romania 0	2 Sweden
18.11.19	Sweden 3	0 Faroe Islands

SWITZERLAND

GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Switzerland	8	5	2	1	19	6	17
2 Denmark	8	4	4	0	23	6	16
3 Republic of Ireland	8	3	4	1	7	5	13
4 Georgia	8	2	2	4	7	11	8
5 Gibraltar	8	0	0	8	3	31	0

23.03.19	Georgia 0	2 Switzerland
26.03.19	Switzerland 3	3 Denmark
05.09.19	Republic of Ireland 1	1 Switzerland
08.09.19	Switzerland 4	0 Gibraltar
12.10.19	Denmark 1	0 Switzerland
15.10.19	Switzerland 2	0 Republic of Ireland
15.11.19	Switzerland 1	0 Georgia
18.11.19	Gibraltar 1	6 Switzerland

TURKEY

GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 France	10	8	1	1	25	6	25
2 Turkey	10	7	2	1	18	3	23
3 Iceland	10	6	1	3	14	11	19
4 Albania	10	4	1	5	16	14	13
5 Andorra	10	1	1	8	3	20	4
6 Moldova	10	1	0	9	4	26	3

22.03.19	Albania 0	2 Turkey
25.03.19	Turkey 4	0 Moldova
08.06.19	Turkey 2	0 France
11.06.19	Iceland 2	1 Turkey
07.09.19	Turkey 1	0 Andorra
10.09.19	Moldova 0	4 Turkey
11.10.19	Turkey 1	0 Albania
14.10.19	France 1	1 Turkey
14.11.19	Turkey 0	0 Iceland
17.11.19	Andorra 0	2 Turkey

UKRAINE

GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Ukraine	8	6	2	0	17	4	20
2 Portugal	8	5	2	1	22	6	17
3 Serbia	8	4	2	2	17	17	14
4 Luxembourg	8	1	1	6	7	16	4
5 Lithuania	8	0	1	7	5	25	1

22.03.19	Portugal 0	0 Ukraine
25.03.19	Luxembourg 1	2 Ukraine
07.06.19	Ukraine 5	0 Serbia
10.06.19	Ukraine 1	0 Luxembourg
07.09.19	Lithuania 0	3 Ukraine
11.10.19	Ukraine 2	0 Lithuania
14.10.19	Ukraine 2	1 Portugal
17.11.19	Serbia 2	2 Ukraine

WALES

GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Croatia	8	5	2	1	17	7	17
2 Wales	8	4	2	2	10	6	14
3 Slovakia	8	4	1	3	13	11	13
4 Hungary	8	4	0	4	8	11	12
5 Azerbaijan	8	0	1	7	5	18	1

24.03.19	Wales 1	0 Slovakia
08.06.19	Croatia 2	1 Wales
11.06.19	Hungary 1	0 Wales
06.09.19	Wales 2	1 Azerbaijan
10.10.19	Slovakia 1	1 Wales
13.10.19	Wales 1	1 Croatia
16.11.19	Azerbaijan 0	2 Wales
19.11.19	Wales 2	0 Hungary

Unbeaten...Spain topped Group F

Talisman...Gareth Bale celebrates against Croatia

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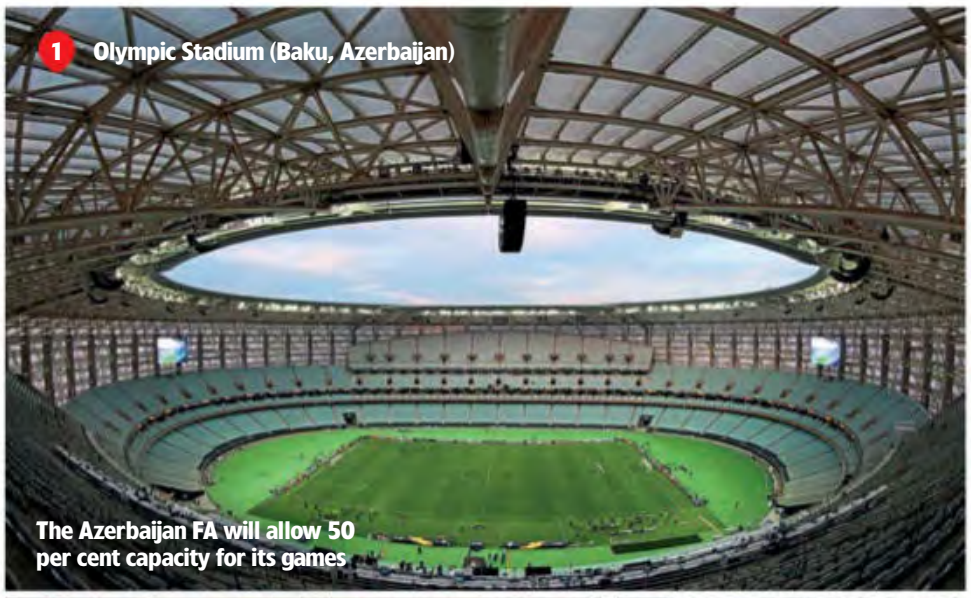
The Stadiums

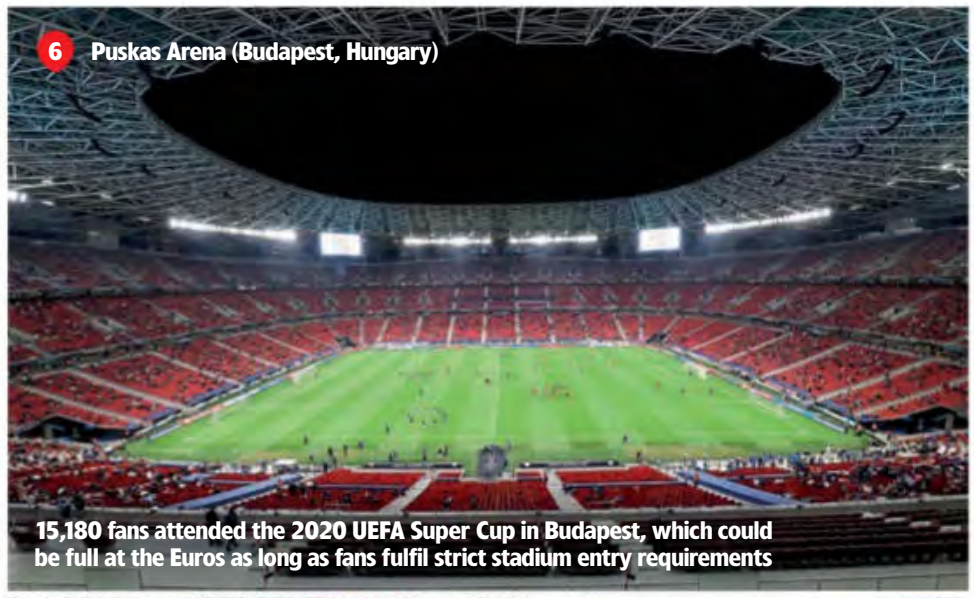
12 venues. 12 cities. 12 nations

● *information correct as of 16.04.21*



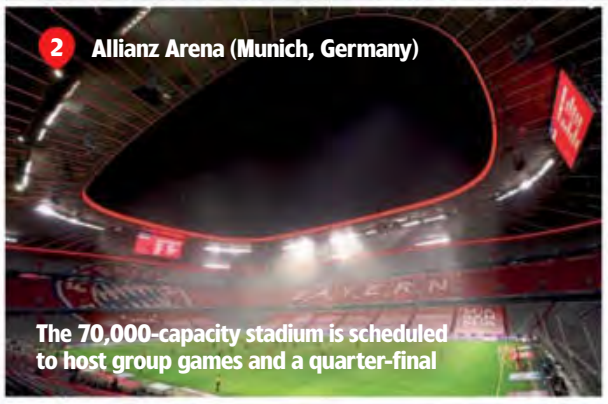
1 Olympic Stadium (Baku, Azerbaijan)

The Azerbaijan FA will allow 50 per cent capacity for its games



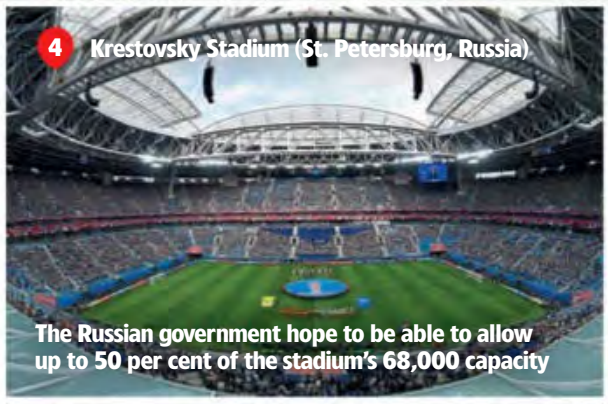
6 Puskas Arena (Budapest, Hungary)

15,180 fans attended the 2020 UEFA Super Cup in Budapest, which could be full at the Euros as long as fans fulfil strict stadium entry requirements



2 Allianz Arena (Munich, Germany)

The 70,000-capacity stadium is scheduled to host group games and a quarter-final



4 Krestovsky Stadium (St. Petersburg, Russia)

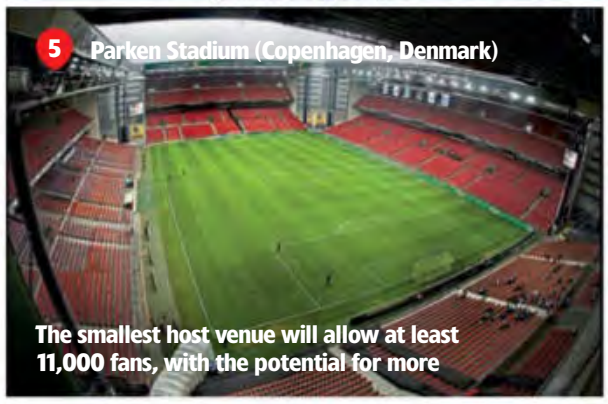
The Russian government hope to be able to allow up to 50 per cent of the stadium's 68,000 capacity

7 Johan Cruyff Arena (Amsterdam, Netherlands)

At least 12,000 supporters will be allowed in the 54,000-capacity ground, according to the KNVB

3 Stadio Olimpico (Rome, Italy)

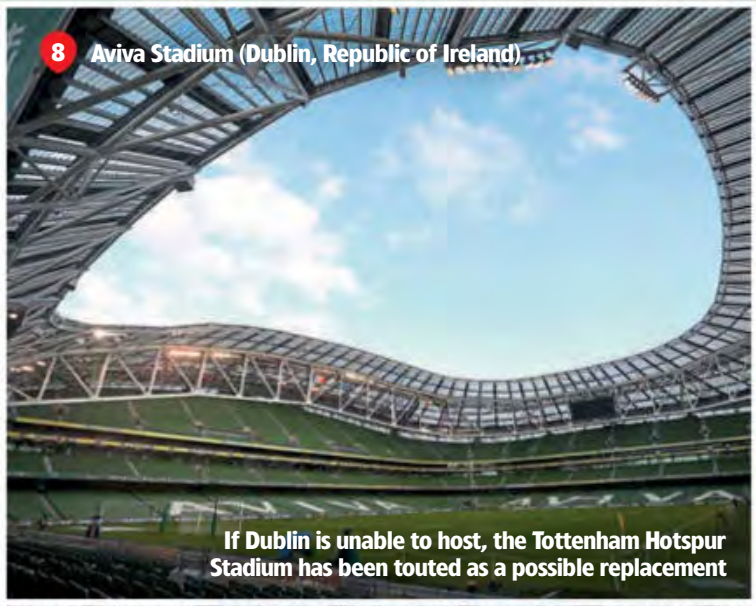
The tournament will begin in Italy's capital, with up to a quarter of the 68,000-capacity stadium in attendance



5 Parken Stadium (Copenhagen, Denmark)

The smallest host venue will allow at least 11,000 fans, with the potential for more

...AND WHERE THEY ARE



8 Aviva Stadium (Dublin, Republic of Ireland)

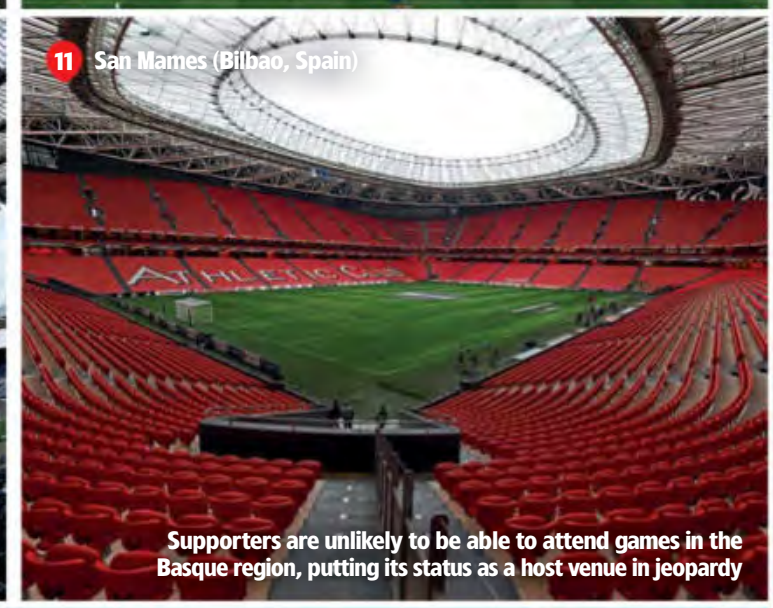
If Dublin is unable to host, the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium has been touted as a possible replacement

9 Arena Nationala (Bucharest, Romania)

The Romanian government plans to welcome 13,000 supporters inside their national arena

10 Hampden Park (Glasgow, Scotland)

The Scottish government has given approval for 12,000 fans



11 San Mames (Bilbao, Spain)

Supporters are unlikely to be able to attend games in the Basque region, putting its status as a host venue in jeopardy

Wembley Stadium (London, England) 12

At least 10,000 fans will be able to watch during the group stage, increasing to 20,000 and potentially more for the final stages

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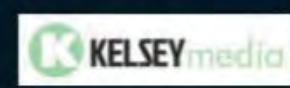

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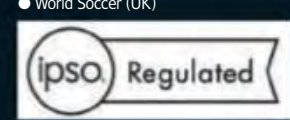

Euro 2020 Schedule

GROUP A

Italy ● Switzerland ● Turkey ● Wales

June 11	Turkey v Italy	(8pm, Rome)
June 12	Wales v Switzerland	(2pm, Baku)
June 16	Turkey v Wales	(5pm, Baku)
June 16	Italy v Switzerland	(8pm, Rome)
June 20	Italy v Wales	(5pm, Rome)
June 20	Switzerland v Turkey	(5pm, Baku)

GROUP B

Belgium ● Russia ● Denmark ● Finland

June 12	Denmark v Finland	(5pm, Copenhagen)
June 12	Belgium v Russia	(8pm, St. Petersburg)
June 16	Finland v Russia	(2pm, St. Petersburg)
June 17	Denmark v Belgium	(5pm, Copenhagen)
June 21	Russia v Denmark	(8pm, Copenhagen)
June 21	Finland v Belgium	(8pm, St. Petersburg)

GROUP C

Ukraine ● Netherlands ● Austria ● North Macedonia

June 13	Austria v North Macedonia	(5pm, Bucharest)
June 13	Netherlands v Ukraine	(8pm, Amsterdam)
June 17	Ukraine v North Macedonia	(2pm, Bucharest)
June 17	Netherlands v Austria	(8pm, Amsterdam)
June 21	North Macedonia v Netherlands	(5pm, Amsterdam)
June 21	Ukraine v Austria	(5pm, Bucharest)

GROUP D

England ● Croatia ● Czech Republic ● Scotland

June 13	England v Croatia	(2pm, London)
June 14	Scotland v Czech Republic	(2pm, Glasgow)
June 18	Croatia v Czech Republic	(5pm, Glasgow)
June 18	England v Scotland	(8pm, London)
June 22	Czech Republic v England	(8pm, London)
June 22	Croatia v Scotland	(8pm, Glasgow)

GROUP E

Spain ● Poland ● Sweden ● Slovakia

June 14	Poland v Slovakia	(5pm, Dublin)
June 14	Spain v Sweden	(8pm, Bilbao)
June 18	Sweden v Slovakia	(2pm, Dublin)
June 19	Spain v Poland	(8pm, Bilbao)
June 23	Slovakia v Spain	(5pm, Bilbao)
June 23	Sweden v Poland	(5pm, Dublin)

GROUP F

Germany ● France ● Portugal ● Hungary

June 15	Hungary v Portugal	(5pm, Budapest)
June 15	France v Germany	(8pm, Munich)
June 19	Hungary v France	(2pm, Budapest)
June 19	Portugal v Germany	(5pm, Munich)
June 23	Germany v Hungary	(8pm, Munich)
June 23	Portugal v France	(8pm, Budapest)

ROUND OF 16

June 26	2A v 2B	(5pm, Amsterdam)
June 26	1A v 2C	(8pm, London)
June 27	1C v 3D/E/F	(5pm, Budapest)
June 27	1B v 3A/D/E/F	(8pm, Bilbao)
June 28	2D v 2E	(5pm, Copenhagen)
June 28	1F v 3A/B/C	(8pm, Bucharest)
June 29	1D v 2F	(5pm, Dublin)
June 29	1E v 3A/B/C/D	(8pm, Glasgow)

QUARTER-FINALS

July 2	Winner 6 v Winner 5	(5pm, St. Petersburg)
July 2	Winner 4 v Winner 2	(8pm, Munich)
July 3	Winner 3 v Winner 1	(5pm, Baku)
July 3	Winner 8 v Winner 7	(8pm, Rome)

SEMI-FINALS

July 6	Winner QF2 v Winner QF1	(8pm, London)
July 7	Winner QF4 v Winner QF3	(8pm, London)

FINAL

July 11	Winner SF1 v Winner SF2	(8pm, London)

● *all kick-off times are BST. Venues correct as of 16.04.21*

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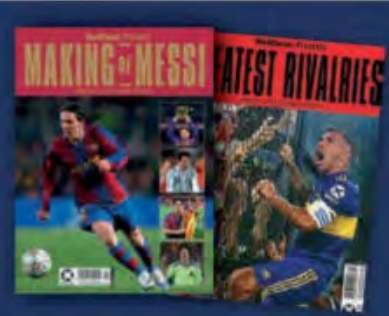

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